

HONG KONG CULTURE AND LITERATURE

HONG KONG STUDIES

The Culture and Politics of Realignment

Edited by

MAGDALEN KI AND
WAYNE WEN-CHUN LIANG



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Introduction

Nestled along the southern seacoast of China, Hong Kong originated as a group of quiet fishing villages before embarking on a journey marked by heavy interventions from multiple regimes, cultural forces, and governments. Over time, the place underwent great metamorphosis, and its development can produce an alignment matrix with often blurry boundaries: “One Colony, One System,” “One Country, Two Systems,” “My Hong Kong, My System,” and “Our Hong Kong-China, (Y)our System.” The question of alignment is a resolved business for some and an unresolved issue for others, resulting in symptoms such as obsession (nostalgia about the old way), anxiety (adjustment issues with the new way), neurosis (uncertainty about the “correct” way), paranoia (fear of the other’s way), inhibition (denial of my way), or anger and acting out (refusal of all ways). Fortunately, Hong Kong people have long displayed great resilience to changes past and present. There is always hope for a better future.

The identity of Hong Kong was forged through a convergence of diverse systems, and its growth works like an intricate and interconnected knot, with constantly unravelling and interweaving rings. From this perspective, Jacques Lacan’s Borromean knot offers an interesting analogy on the growth of Hong Kong. Just as the Borromean knot represents the convergence of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic domains,¹ the evolution of Hong Kong interlaces multiple dimensions. When the rings are in good order, the knot can be expanded with an indefinite number of rings, just as Hong Kong is famous for its adaptability, providing a strong sense of accommodation amidst a backdrop of constant change. When the knot is out of order, the rings are broken, and the rise of social symptoms showcases people’s maladjustment and problematic alignment with the different order of things.

Hong Kong people like to climb the Lion Rock Hill, but the “Real” order of Hong Kong embodies an unmediated fullness that produces enigma and fascination. The terrain is a captivating amalgamation of the familiar and the unfamiliar, evoking a sense of unknowingness and uncertainty. Despite its modest size, Hong Kong is inherently characterized by both abundance and absence. The central urban areas convey stories from its rich and convoluted history, yet a significant portion of the local history remains undocumented and lost. Many of the many outlying islands stand as a testament to an ancient geological past, but the landscape defies easy representation or symbolization and is

1 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXII: RSI. 1974–75*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, sec.10.12.74, www.lacaninireland.com.

“radically unassimilable to the signifier.”² This inherent indefinability turns the “Real” Hong Kong into an epistemological enigma, producing endless wonder and angst.

On the other hand, the “Imaginary” Hong Kong exemplifies a self-constructed image anchored in a tapestry of visions and fantasies. Similar to an individual seeking self-understanding through multiple reflections in a mirror, reminiscent of the age-old question—“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all,” these mirrored self-images play a pivotal role in crafting the illusion of a unified identity, concealing any gaps in self-recognition. The Hong Kong Imaginary thus serves as a lens for locals to celebrate their collective identity. Iconic symbols from yesteryears—be it sampan boats, rickshaws, temples, Bruce Lee (1940–1973), the Kowloon Walled City, or the Peninsula Hotel—serve as a backdrop for self-identification, propelling an idealized fantasy and fostering a deep-rooted Hong Kong pride. The city further positions itself as one of the Four Asian Tigers and identifies with “The Way of the Dragon,” an homage to Bruce Lee’s cinematic legacy, hinting at Hong Kong’s power, vivacity, and pursuit of excellence. The Hong Kong metropolis has undergone many changes, but the Hong Kong Dream remains alive.

The fantasy of the Hong Kong Dream resonates with many, but remains elusive for some. The bustling, diverse sounds of modern Hong Kong act as an “acoustic mirror,” a term borrowed from Kaja Silverman, reflecting cacophony rather than harmony. Depending on people’s ethnic, gender, age, class, or political background, Hongkongers articulate their wishes through a wide array of cultural and political demands. Some feel subjugated, and are silenced for different reasons. Others turn to positive “new forms of sexual, social, political, and artistic practice” to engage with the “dream of unity.”³ As time progresses, the “magic mirror” of Hong Kong, though not shattered, reveals fissures in its reflection.

In this vein, the “Symbolic” Hong Kong highlights the proliferation of divergent discourses about the city. Local Hongkongers, migrants, refugees, returnees, expatriates, government officials, and tourists all construct different versions of Hong Kong, showcasing a wide range of data, histories, stories, and ideologies. Given that the fate of Hong Kong has been molded by the Qing dynasty, the British administration, the Japanese occupation, and the Chinese government, people have diverse stories to tell. Places such as the Kowloon Walled City, Chungking Mansions, and the Legislative Council complex

2 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses, 1955–56*, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 179.

3 Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139.

further prompt Hongkongers to take note of the different linguistic registers, cultural events, and political discourses that mark locals' collective memories. These accumulated discourses can increase our understanding of the city on the one hand and question the paradigmatic shifts and development of Hong Kong on the other.

The mismatch between the Hong Kong Dream, the Hong Kong discourses, and the Real Hong Kong can create cognitive dissonance, leading to an unknotting process in the mind. As mentioned above, a well-structured Borromean knot displays harmony and stability. The three interwoven rings depend on one another, converging at a nexus that highlights the fusion of distinct but interconnected domains. While these rings can be adjusted, loosened, retied, and reworked over and over, a radical unknotting can have serious consequences. The essence of Lacan's analogy lies in the concept that if any one of the rings is severed, the entire Borromean knot becomes destabilized. Nonetheless, stability can be re-established by introducing a fourth ring, the *sinthome*, which interlaces both beneath and above the other rings. The *sinthome* can hold the structure together, thus, as Lacan suggests, constituting a "psychical reality" that allows the subject "to be in the enjoyment of the Other."⁴ In other words, in the absence of perfect alignment, the *sinthome* allows each individual to function within the society by providing a new and unique organization of collective and individual enjoyment and minimizing the rise of (social) symptoms.

There are good reasons why symptoms can arise. Since the twentieth century, the demographic landscape has undergone significant transformation due to multiple waves of migration. It commenced with mainland Chinese immigrants in the 1950s, followed by the arrivals of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s, while the city later witnessed the growth of communities comprising minority residents, including Filipino and Indonesian domestic helpers after 1997. As a result, Hong Kong's population has expanded and diversified, reflecting its vibrant and inclusive character. The movement of local citizens—departures, returns, and seasonal migrations—has also generated different narratives, each imbued with personal experiences, social memories, and ever-shifting cultural and ideological currents.

Culturally, it is debatable whether Hong Kong is a "melting pot" that celebrates homogenous assimilation, a "salad bowl" that champions heterogenous togetherness, or a "condiment holder" that highlights people's non-integrated co-existence. Chungking Mansions stands as a vivid emblem of Hong Kong's

4 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXII: RSI, 1974–75, sec.14.1.75.*

diversity, with its five blocks reportedly housing residents from nearly “120 different nationalities.”⁵ While community life and trade flourish, so does crime. On the other hand, the city’s public spaces come alive at night with elderly “aunties” indulging in square dancing and loud Mandarin Chinese songs, much to the puzzlement and amusement of local Hongkongers. Moreover, different cultural groups speak differently. The city’s LGBTQIA community seeks both acknowledgment and rights within the socio-political landscape. The poor, who live in subdivided flats, are discontented with soaring property prices and job-related anxieties. On Sundays, domestic helpers gather in Central and create a space that is uniquely their own.

According to Levi Bryant, if “the ring of the Imaginary” refers “to the domain of ideology, signs, group identities, political parties, images, the content of media,” then the symbolic would refer to “the domain of laws, institutions, governmental systems, economy, as well as language.”⁶ The destinies of Hong Kong were deeply entwined with the Imperial Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the colonial British administration (1842–1997), and the Chinese Communist regime (1949–). While imperial law and institutions clashed with colonial law and institutions, the colonial government leaned toward a democratic discourse in the 1990s, and the Hong Kong government emphasized a pro-Communist discourse in the post-handover period. In the process, the young and their parents may develop different political orientations, spanning the gamut from left to right. Hong Kong people have also come to recognize the significance of trilingualism and the incorporation of politically correct discourses, even though the very idea of “correctness” can sometimes trigger debates and controversies.

On that note, the *sinthome* highlights a Lacanian solution. The symptom is a message to the Other, displaying erratic and disruptive behaviors to get attention (e.g., quarrels, protests, strikes). However, identification with the *sinthome* directs people to engage with different discourses and fantasies in order to re-investigate the law and re-invent and re-create the ways of the self and the Other. In this respect, Lacan mentions how James Joyce’s writing can “loosen up” the law (of writing, semantics, syntax) at many levels and offer a new, personal way to negotiate with the collective unconscious, individual viewpoints, and social fantasies.

The ensuing effect of the *sinthome* is that it can lead to the emergence of new “anchoring,” and “quilting points” that allow people to function within

5 Rhea Mogul, “Inside Hong Kong’s Chungking Mansions: 5 Blocks of Diversity, Culture and Community,” *Young Post—South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2019.

6 Levi R. Bryant, “Symbolic,” *Larval Subjects*, 8 December 2009, <https://larvalsubject.wordpress.com/category/symbolic>.

existing parameters, maintain a private sense of enjoyment, and remain supportive of the general order. In turn, the sinthome offers a constructive approach to going beyond the Symbolic superego, which drives the subject to adhere strictly to the Letter/Law while paying no attention to sympathy or humanity, the Imaginary ego, which reduces the subject to a state of narcissistic self-complacency while constantly seeking validation from the Other/Father, and the Real identity, which directs the subject to welcome chaos and uncertainty, thus cancelling Law and Order. As Edward Dioguardi argues, “this is not to say that the knots do not remain undone—or that, in any event, we simply suppose that the people’s functioning in reality means the three rings are linked—but demonstrated that the sinthome is that which can be supposed as supporting the unity of the three rings.”⁷ The sinthome advocates a *prosocial enjoyment*, a high-functioning *creativity* to re-engage with society, and a *self-empowering process* designed to address the unconscious, symbolic discourses, and the cultural imaginary. The sinthome can manifest as an indulgence in new life experiences (online or offline), the rise of new habitus (body skills, lifestyles, or other), the pursuit of new life goals and outlooks, or the mastery of minority discourses. The sinthome encourages individuals to find unique ways to deal with the multiple, disparate order of things. This volume seeks to establish a re-anchoring for Hong Kong to pursue the realignment of culture and politics.

The first section of this edited volume investigates the bearings of the political compass in Hong Kong. In Chapter 1, **Wayne Wen-chun Liang and Magdalen Ki** highlight Hong Kong as a migrant society, using John W. Berry’s model of the psychology of immigration. They argue that Hong Kong thrives on a history of diverse alignments, hence a robust realignment strategy should focus on navigating and negotiating the multiple political and cultural domains. In Chapter 2, **Magdalen Ki** discusses the threats of surveillance capitalism and digital authoritarianism. She pinpoints the problems of digital master-slave dialectic, panoptic data-analysis, digital doubling, and self-promoting surveillance in the postmodern era, arguing for greater data vigilance and safeguarding for the protection of individual rights. In Chapter 3, **Jennifer Eagleton** analyses poster advertisements displayed in MTR stations, using a multimodal discourse analysis framework to investigate how the Hong Kong Government shapes the past and the future. In Chapter 4, **Vinton Poon** deploys a frame analysis to examine a TV show, validating the power of individual agency to

7 Edward Dioguardi, “Lacan’s Sinthome; or the Point of Psychoanalysis.” *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 7, no.2 (2021): n.p. <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/lacans-sinthome-or-the-point-of-psychoanalysis>.

question political propaganda. In Chapter 5, **Shun Man Emily Chow-Quesada** contests Ackbar Abbas's idea that Hong Kong is characterized by a cultural space of disappearance. Contemporary Hong Kong writers use creative languages, expressions, and marginalized characters to construct a minor literature, activating cognitive changes and promoting de/re-territorialisation so that missing people can have a voice of their own.

The second section of the volume examines the matrix of the cultural compass in Hong Kong society. In Chapter 6, **Chi Sum Garfield Lau** discusses the different dimensions and impacts of positive and negative orientalism. From past to present, orientalist can position China and Hong Kong in many ways to benefit themselves; hence Lau argues that an orientalist understanding of the East should be contextualized in light of personal, economic, political, and cultural motives. In Chapter 7, **Jim Cocola** analyses the geopolitics of Vietnam, China, and Hong Kong in Ann Hui's 1982 film *Boat People*, highlighting a link between past and current regional and political conflicts along the rim of the South China Sea. In Chapter 8, **Magdalen Ki** focuses on differences between vampires in the West and hopping vampires in the East and uses the Mr Vampire series to analyze the integrationist outlook in the colonial Hong Kong film industry, noting that vampire hunters' mission is to protect the pluralistic, inclusive city. In Chapter 9, **Miguel Antonio N. Lizada** uses Rey Chow's concept of sentimentality to examine *Still Human*—a film that showcases the loving relationship between a Filipino domestic helper and a Hongkonger. The sanitized depiction of the employer-employee contractual bond showcases as well as hides the neoliberal agenda of Hong Kong's society. The film softens audiences but does not invite them to challenge the systematic inequality and exploitation built within the paradigms of Hong Kong capitalism. In Chapter 10, **Antony Huen and Jason Eng Hun Lee** track the rise of creative writing programs in tertiary education and the impact of institutional creativity. One notable repercussion is the emergence of new creative writing communities in civil society with a view to changing the marginalized status of creative writing in English. This chapter illuminates how community-centric and department-driven pedagogical and publishing endeavors can invigorate the local literary sphere.

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PART 1

Hong Kong and the Evolving Political Compass



The Rise of Hong Kong and the Problem of Alignment

Wayne Wen-chun Liang and Magdalen Ki

1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review the multifaceted development of Hong Kong. Originally a sanctuary for pirates, Hong Kong became a British colony, a Japanese-occupied warzone, a society of migrants, a manufacturing hub, and a trading post. Han Suyin 韓素音 (1916–2012) described colonial Hong Kong as living on “borrowed time in a borrowed place.”¹ Prior to the 1997 British handover of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the city had already established itself as a shopping paradise, a cultural hub, a financial center, and a sojourning community that welcomed overseas workers, expatriates, migrants, and refugees to varying degrees. Following the handover to China in July 1997, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC, benefiting from the “One Country, Two Systems” principle.

Given its relatively small size of only 1,114 square kilometers, residents of Hong Kong are keenly aware that their survival depends on a strategic alignment of their interests with those of both the PRC and the wider world. Whether colonial or not, the government may opt for policies that gear toward the interests of the ruling elites but not the average citizens, creating an alignment gap in a class society. Owing to Hong Kong’s in-between status, Hongkongers have historically adopted diverse alignments to accommodate Mainland China, global, and local interests, customs, and ideologies. This culture of multiple alignments leads Hong Kong people to ponder their perplexing sociopolitical orientations and cultural identities, indicating what Ackbar Abbas refers to as their “hyphenated” identity.² Successful realignment means that the city embraces multi-faceted integrationism that welcomes sociopolitical and cultural integrity while respecting differences, thus ensuring Hong Kong’s societal

1 Quoted from Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 142.

2 Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance*, 142.

stability while allowing each component to function as an integral part for the whole.

Hongkongers' hyphenated identities are products of historical legacies, where different peoples and ideologies intersect: a small number of natives live with a large number of migrants, Eastern and Western cultures collide, and capitalists mingle with communists. Given that Hong Kong is a migrant city, John W. Berry's four-factor AIMS model—namely, separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration—offers a powerful framework for studying the consequences of these encounters, examining individuals' nuanced strategies for realignment and adjustment to the host culture and the home cultures.³ Berry's interest in immigration directs him to highlight four factors, which foreground individuals' nuanced alignment strategies, adjusting their identification(s) with the old way and the new way. Policymakers contribute to this confusion when they shape, build, and reform the landscape of Hong Kong culture and politics.

Berry's primary interest is the psychology of migrants in both dominant and non-dominant groups. Firstly, separation emphasizes individuals' loyalty to their home culture and a blatant refusal to adopt new ways or assimilate into the host population. As pointed out by John Berry and Colette Sabatier, when "separation is forced by the dominant group it is *segregation*."⁴ Segregationists discourage others from adopting their ways. In an extreme form, it implies active discrimination, persecution, and total *exclusion* of others in the socioeconomic, cultural, and political domains of a society.

On a different note, when separation is initiated by a minority group, it signifies *nativism*, or a deliberate apartness from the national society. If this apartness is a voluntary choice, the minority group demonstrates a strong sense of ethnic pride, cultural cohesion, and status security, which means group members are not afraid of being out of alignment with locals in terms of language or social customs. However, if the apartness is a forced choice, the minority group often finds itself consisting of subalterns susceptible to harboring feelings of "hatred, envy, resentment, suspicion, and revenge," or what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*.⁵ When subalterns become malcontents, they can easily be radicalized due to their persistent status as outcasts.

3 John Berry, "Integration and Multiculturalism: Ways Towards Social Solidarity," *Papers on Social Representations* 20, no. 1 (2011): 2.1–21.

4 John W. Berry and Colette Sabatier, "The Acculturation and Adaptation of Second-Generation Immigrant Youth in Toronto and Montreal," *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, and Cultural Transformation*, eds. Susan S. Chuang, Robert P Mereno (Lanham, MD: Lexington books, 2011), 130.

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 48.

Secondly, assimilation refers to a migrant's total identification with the host population and culture, leading to the abandonment of their own national, linguistic, or cultural heritage and traditions. When assimilationism is enforced by the dominant group in society, it is referred to as a "melting pot."⁶ In such cases, the ruling elites may employ various methods, both soft and high-handed, to impose laws on the non-dominant group, aiming to erase its language, customs, and lifestyle. When assimilation is pursued by the non-dominant group, it often arises from psychological, cultural, or racial insecurity, leading to "maximal learning of features of the dominant society by non-dominant individuals, combined with minimal memory for (maximal forgetting of) features of one's heritage culture."⁷ However, extreme copycatism and complete localization can be a double-edged sword. Those who "try too hard" to assimilate can face blame and rejection by their homegroup, and non-acceptance and ridicule from the host population.

Thirdly, marginalization signifies people's strong rejection of both home and host cultures. When the dominant group actively justifies the rejection of both cultures, it often champions a (maverick) *atomic individualism* or non-chalance. On the other hand, when a minority group rejects all cultures, it indicates extreme *self-alienation* and a sense of rootlessness. These individuals find themselves living in a state of cultural vacuum and cognitive dissonance, unable to identify with either the old or new ways. The drawbacks of marginalization have been highlighted by Robert Putnam in his work *Bowling Alone*, where he notes that sociopolitical disidentification is often accompanied by an increase in civic disengagement and a decrease in civic awareness, political participation, and social capital.⁸ Interestingly, marginalization is not without its advantages. As individualists reject groupthink, they are characterized by a longing for maximal freedom, including freedom of choice. Individualists often exhibit a liberal orientation that resists "ethnocentric and authoritarian beliefs," and they tend to show strong tolerance toward both ingroup and outgroup members.⁹

Finally, integration emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and diversity, or a good balance between preserving the distinctiveness of the home culture and the host culture. When the non-dominant group seeks inclusivity and diversity, it implies *activism* and *adaptation*. On the other hand, when the

6 Berry and Sabatier, "The Acculturation and Adaptation of Second-Generation Immigrant Youth in Toronto and Montreal," 130.

7 Berry, "Integration and Multiculturalism," 2.15.

8 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 60.

9 Annie Montreuil and Richard Y. Bourhis, "Majority Acculturation Orientations Toward Valued And Devalued Immigrants," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 32, no. 6 (2001): 712.

dominant group advocates diversity, it indicates the promotion of a pluralistic society. *Pluralism* thrives when the level of ethnic diversity is high, allowing different groups to coexist and contribute to the growth of the society.¹⁰ For example, if a workplace is filled with people from different backgrounds, this tends to foster a balance of power as well as the development of organic bonds. More often than not, group coexistence takes the form of coordinated parallel worlds, where people continue to live in relatively distinct homegroups. However, there is also a high degree of overlap in terms of functional or interdependent ties with other groups. For example, a government or society may import overseas workers to fill a niche market, leading to intergroup exchanges that occur within specific settings and serve highly functional purposes. At other times, a large group of newcomers may dominate a particular employment sector (e.g., domestic service, construction, farming), resulting in a distinct, interdependent bond with the locals.

To sustain prolonged integrationism, both local and nonlocal people need subjective factors such as mutual goodwill and intentions, as well as objective abilities including cognitive, linguistic, and cultural competence, and situational conditions encompassing continuous exposure, contact, communication, positive experiences, and political rights for equal participation. These factors must combat long-standing political, socioeconomic, cultural, and racial myths and prejudices. Teresa Lafromboise, Hardin Coleman and Jennifer Gerton observe that integration usually leads to five pathways.¹¹ First, integration can result in "assimilation," where cultural convergence prompts individuals to lose their cultural heritage. Second, it can generate "acculturation," where the dominant group adopts new ways while individuals in the minority group learn new norms albeit while continuing to identify with their minority culture. Third, integration can take the direction of "alternation," wherein individuals become contextualists, exhibiting a chameleon-like, context-dependent behavior in order to blend in and adapt to different situations. They lean toward the home culture when with the homegroup but are equally comfortable when interacting with the host culture. Fourth, "multiculturalism" emphasizes the voluntary collaboration of individuals from diverse backgrounds who work or stay together to serve mutual interests. Fifth, "fusion" highlights the formation of a second culture wherein regardless of their diverse

10 Berry, "Integration and Multiculturalism," 2.3.

11 See Teresa LaFromboise, Hardin L.K. Coleman, and Jennifer Gerton, "Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory," *Psychological Bulletin* 114, no. 3 (1993): 395-412.

backgrounds individuals share specific political, economic, and ideological interests.¹²

On that note, policymakers often have their own political compass, and implement policies that may—or may not—align well with the voice of the people. Generally speaking, in a homogenous tribal society, where survival is paramount, the culture and politics of alignment tend to follow a straightforward path as the interests of the ruling class, governing authorities, and the people can easily overlap. In an authoritarian society, the politics of super-alignment prevail, with centralized control and integration serving the dominant regime. However, in societies influenced by heterogeneous forces both internally and externally, people exhibit complex patterns of alignment. On the one hand, they may favor a strategic cooperation with the dominant authorities, while on the other hand, they may gravitate toward conservative patriotism as well as seemingly liberal, “off-center” networks that align with their self-interest as well as and the broader interests of others and the world. These intricate political and cultural compasses contribute to the uniqueness of a society, foregrounding people’s choices and their context-dependent alignment strategies.

2 Old Hong Kong

From the very beginning, the fate of Hong Kong was out of alignment due to two imperial agendas. As noted by the British historian Frank Welsh (1931–2023), Hong Kong was an offspring of two “unwilling parents,” being the “natural child” of Victorian Britain and Qing China, and its birth was linked to the opium trade. As a result, Hong Kong was “a source of embarrassment and annoyance to its progenitors.”¹³ The Treaty of Nanking in 1842 forcibly conceded Hong Kong Island to Britain, a case of forced separation from the motherland. The signing of the Convention of Peking in 1860 brought the Kowloon Peninsula under British rule. Subsequently, in 1898, China leased the New Territories to Britain for a period of 99 years. Lord Palmerston (1784–1865), the British Foreign Secretary, initially deemed Hong Kong to be an unpromising trade post, viewing it as a temporary port for ship refitting rather than a permanent settlement. Consequently, the colonial government received instructions to exercise frugality across all departments.

12 See LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton, “Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory,” 401.

13 Frank Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 1.

In the early years of trade colonialism, the government pursued a policy of separation, employing a “divide and rule” strategy to achieve a mechanical solidarity within the social fabric. The dominant class prioritized containment and control, ensuring a clear divide between the colonial elites and impoverished locals. British traders, whose primary occupation revolved around the opium trade, used the government to maximize their interests, with “no intention of allowing the much larger Chinese population any say in things whatsoever.” The first governor, Sir Henry Pottinger (1789–1865), found Hong Kong a “tedious place,” so he “enjoyed his glass and his lass, smoked his cigar, and took things easy.”¹⁴ The Legislative Council established by Pottinger in 1843 consisted of only three appointed government officials and himself. It was not until 1850 that non-officials were allowed to join as members, including David Jardine (1818–1865) of the Jardines Company and Joseph Frost Edger of Jamieson, How, & Company. The British traders lived in European-style houses and were segregated from the Chinese population while holding the belief that English laws and customs were unsuited for the native residents. Colonial pride fueled the perception that the Chinese should manage their own affairs. It was not until 1882 that Ng Choy 伍才 or Wu Ting-fan 伍廷芳 (1842–1922) became the first appointed local non-official member of the Legislative Council, and it was not until 1965 that Ellen Li Shu-pui 李樹培夫人 (1908–2005) became the first female non-official member. The Colonial Office showed little interest in politics or democracy, leading to indirect elections only being held in 1985 and direct elections in 1991.

The colonial government further implemented exclusionary measures to deal with problematic (local or non-local) individuals. From 1847 to 1862, magistrates were empowered to deport pirates, “Chinese beggars, suspicious persons, and convicted felons” as well as individuals such as “French and Russian prostitutes, Japanese and American convicts, German and Austrian prisoners of war, and Vietnamese and East Indies revolutionaries.” The government considered this policy to be its “best trump card.”¹⁵ The targeted subjects primarily consisted of outlaws—pirates, opium smugglers, members of Triad societies, and seamen. Pottinger also endorsed a policy of “gunboat diplomacy” at the ports to monitor Jardine Matheson and Dent opium ships as well as local opium smuggling vessels, on which thieves, robbers, pimps, and prostitutes

14 Ibid., 150.

15 Christopher Munn, “Our Best Trump Card: A Brief History of Deportation in Hong Kong, 1857–1955,” in *Civil Unrest and Governance in Hong Kong: Law and Order from Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Michael Ng and John Wong (New York: Routledge, 2019), 27, 42.

were prevalent.¹⁶ The gunboats were powerful enough to drive some gangsters and pirates to outlying islands, but many conflicts between the British colonists and Chinese subjects remained unsolved.

Noting the significant differences between Chinese and English legal systems, the second governor of Hong Kong, John Francis Davis (1795–1890), championed the approach of “negotiated” colonialism. He decided to hand over a pirate named Chan A-tai to the Chinese authorities for robbing a British army treasure boat. Davis justified this decision by stating that “there would be no sufficient evidence according to the technicalities of the English law to condemn [the pirate] on the first opening of the Supreme Court.”¹⁷ In 1847, Foreign Secretary Palmerston, who later became Prime Minister, instructed John Davis that “all the English in China” should “abstain from giving the Chinese any ground for complaint,” provocation, or affront while also emphasizing the necessity to respect British treaty rights. If the Chinese “attack our people and our factories, they will be shot.”¹⁸ Instead of shooting locals and creating more conflicts, John Bowring (1792–1872), the fourth governor, chose to hand over 73 alleged pirates seized in the harbor to the Chinese authorities for summary execution in 1857. Bowring’s another tactic was to charter “a ship to deport 167 minor offenders and men of the ‘suspected classes’ to remote Hainan Island, where they were dumped on a beach and left to fend for themselves.”¹⁹

Recognizing the vast differences between the Asian and European cultures, the colonial government wisely refrained from pushing assimilationism. Instead, it adopted a multi-tiered approach, bringing in foreign delegates and surrogates, and utilizing “the other” to rule “the other” as Hong Kong gradually morphed into a migrant society. Charles May (1817–1879), an inspector in the Metropolitan Police, organized the police force in 1844, predominantly consisting of Europeans or Indians, with Chinese recruits joining after 1847. A strong police presence was necessary as the majority of locals, including villagers, fishers, and pirates, were impoverished. The population of Hong Kong grew from 7,450 in 1841 to 23,817 in 1845.²⁰ Many newcomers were single Chinese male workers recruited by labor contractors. The pursuit of quick wealth among these immigrants contributed to a rise in crime rates. The influx of refugees and immigrants from the Mainland during the Tai Ping Rebellion

16 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 167.

17 Munn, “Our Best Trump Card,” 28.

18 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 179.

19 Munn, “Our Best Trump Card,” 28.

20 See Fan Shuh Ching, *The Population of Hong Kong* (Committee for International Coordination of National Research in Demography, 1974), 1.

(1850–1864) further swelled the population to 86,941 in 1859.²¹ A period of just two weeks saw the “shooting of four men with fireballs upon them; temporary stupefaction of three Europeans after eating poisoned soup; discovery of a headless body; firing matsheds in Queen’s Road Central.”²² In 1912, fifty pirates attacked the Cheung Chau Police Station, leading to the death of an Indian Lance Sergeant, two Indian police officers, and two pirates.

Since native Hongkongers and Chinese migrants felt disconnected from both the Qing dynasty and the colonial government, many harbored discontent and aligned closely with their patriotic sentiment and cultural identity, while others fell victim to the psychology of resentment and took action to vent their frustration. One incident in 1857 involved a case of mass poisoning where arsenic was found in European-style bread from the E-sing Bakery (裕成辦館). Several hundred Europeans fell ill, and suspicions arose that the bakery owner wanted to wipe out the colonists. As a result, the entire bakery workforce was incarcerated, with “forty-two of them in a room fifteen feet square.” However, the power of the Chinese fraternity was evident as some observed that the prison door was occasionally left open.²³ Eventually, the owner was acquitted but had to leave the colony. George Duddell (1821–1887)—a wealthy merchant and the first holder of the monopoly to sell opium territory-wide—then became responsible for the bread supply. Another arson incident in 1857 indicated that racial tensions were unsolved.

The aftermath was that Governor Bowring heightened the policy of separation to tighten law and order. He hired 1,000 new police officers and requested 5,000 soldiers to be transferred from London to Hong Kong. The 1857 Peace of the Colony Ordinance banned all nighttime events for the Chinese. A curfew was imposed between 8pm in the evening and sunrise, and all Chinese residents were required to carry a night pass issued by their foreign employers to go to places other than their home. Offenders would be subject to punishment by any Justice of the Peace by a “fine or imprisonment, or by public whipping, and public exposure in the Stocks.” Furthermore, extra-legal vigilantism was encouraged: “Every Person lawfully acting as Sentry or Patrol is hereby authorized ... to fire upon with intent or effect to kill,” and “No Act done or attempted in pursuance of this Ordinance shall be questioned in any court.”²⁴ In 1888, the European District Reservation Ordinance “prohibited the building of any

21 Fan, *The Population of Hong Kong*, 1.

22 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 214.

23 Ibid., 214–215.

24 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 215.

‘Chinese tenement’ within the so-called ‘European District.’”²⁵ Similarly, in 1904, Section 3 of the Hill District Reservation Ordinance decreed that Chinese individuals were not allowed to set foot on any property in Victoria Peak unless they were servants, coolies, or rickshaw pullers. These racial segregation policies were justified on medical grounds, citing the concern over local sanitary conditions due to the spread of a bubonic plague epidemic from China to Hong Kong in 1894. This Ordinance was replaced by the Peak District Ordinance of 1918. In 1919, the colonizers further reserved the hilly parts of Cheung Chau (長洲) to themselves through the Cheung Chau (Residence) Ordinance. Both of these two ordinances were repealed in 1946.

Hong Kong people had to endure racial discrimination and political exclusion, hence the place had a long and colorful history of social disturbances, and public resistance sometimes compelled the government to make concessions. In August 1844, two years after the British occupation of the Hong Kong Island, Governor Davis passed the Registration and Census Ordinance and requested that all male inhabitants age 21 or above must obtain a registration ticket and pay a poll tax every year—HK\$5 for Europeans and HK\$1 for Chinese subjects. Both groups found the scheme excessive: three thousand Chinese people chose to return to China, and European merchants liaised with the locals to protest against this law. A city-wide strike lasted for three months, resulting in the government’s decision to repeal the ordinance in November. Another example was the law that required all Chinese residents to carry a lantern and a written pass at night. As many Chinese chose to defy this law, an average of 1,007 arrests were made annually between “1873 and 1877, (or close to three a day)” for offenses related to the absence of a pass or light.²⁶ People also questioned the discrepancy in operating hours between Chinese theaters, which had to close at 11 pm, and City Hall, where Europeans could enjoy entertainment until 1 am. The night pass system was eventually abolished in 1897.

Locals not only objected to differential treatment but also contested the imposition of a “one-size-fits-all” model that disregarded cultural customs and sensitivities. In response to the prevalence of venereal disease, the government implemented a license system to monitor brothels. Red light areas were separated into different brothels catering to Europeans, Indians, or Chinese clients. According to the 1845 census, there were 26 brothels compared to only 78

25 Lawrence W.C. Lai, “Discriminatory Zoning in Colonial Hong Kong,” *Property Management* 29, no. 1 (2011): 54.

26 Alain Le Pichon, “Crime and its Punishment in Victorian Hong Kong,” *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online] 12, no. 3 (2003), <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/1613>.

family houses. Individuals wishing to engage in this profession had to be over 19 years old and undergo close scrutiny by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, including providing three photographs to ensure they did so of their own free will. "The Secretariat fixed the charges which the mistresses might levy on their girls for board and lodging," and gave each girl a "card showing her number, name, and address, to which one photograph was attached. One photograph was retained by the Secretariat and the third by the brothel mistresses."²⁷ In the 1860s, the British Parliament passed the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866, 1869, granting the police the authority to "subject suspected prostitutes to forcible internal examination" and "to imprison them if they were found to carry the disease."²⁸ In 1867, the Contagious Diseases Ordinance was passed, requiring every licensed brothel to be subject to inspection at all times by the Registrar General, Inspector Hospitals, Visiting Surgeons, and the Superintendent of Police. While girls in the European brothels visited doctors for examination, those in Chinese brothels objected to being examined by male doctors for both cultural and personal reasons.

The prevalence of unlicensed brothels gave rise to "sly brothels," with women working in these unlicensed establishments "fined \$50 or imprisoned for any term not exceeding two months."²⁹ As the police were sent to identify unregistered brothels, the infection rate among them rose, with 16.6 percent of police officers suffering from syphilis in 1869 compared to just "under 7 per cent for servicemen."³⁰ Among British soldiers and sailors in Hong Kong, 246 out of 1,000 were found to be unfit for duty due to venereal disease in the 1880s. In 1890, the number of syphilis cases continued to rise, and the Colonial Office and the Hong Kong administration decided to take radical measures. As a result, magistrates were empowered to close down any brothel that came to the attention of the police.

The colonial government carefully curated the policy of disenfranchisement to rule Hong Kong. When the Sino-French War (1884–5) broke out, Hong Kong dock workers rooted for China, refused to work for French vessels, and rioted in 1884. The government was greatly alarmed upon knowing the Qing government's involvement with the movement, and how "emissaries from the Guangzhou government had interviewed some Triads and promised them pardon for past offenses" if they would return to China and enlist to fight against

27 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 391.

28 Le Pichon, "Crime and its Punishment in Victorian Hong Kong."

29 Historical Laws of Hong Kong Online, "Contagious Diseases Ordinance, 1867," <https://oelawhk.lib.hku.hk/items/show/237>.

30 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 262.

the French.³¹ In 1887, the Triad and Secret Societies Ordinance was enacted in Hong Kong to depoliticize Hong Kong and control various types of (revolutionary) societies. Around 1890, the “Four Bandits” (四大寇) emerged, one of its members being Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925), a graduate of Dr Manson’s Hong Kong College of Medicine from the class of 1892. In 1895, Sun founded a branch for the Association for the Regeneration of China in Hong Kong 香港興中會 (another was in Honolulu). However, Sir William Robinson (1836–1912)—the 11th governor—sought to avoid a revolution that would unsettle the Qing dynasty and issued an order banning Sun’s entry into Hong Kong. Despite the obstacles, Sun’s persistent efforts eventually contributed to the founding of the Republic of China. In response, the Hong Kong government introduced the Societies Ordinance of 1920, granting it the power to ban any society deemed dangerous to the colony. In 1949, an amendment mandated registration for all associations with more than ten members, primarily to monitor political organizations with ties to either the Chinese Nationalists or the Communists. In addition, posting Chinese proclamations required permission from the Registrar General, while defacing or tearing government’s public notices or proclamations was prohibited.

In the early years, Chinese migrants considered China as “home” and Hong Kong was a transitional community—a safe haven for seeking security and wealth, or a gateway city through which to return home or venture overseas. The 1911 Chinese Revolution resulted in an influx of immigrants, with motivations ranging from survival and patriotism to enrichment. In 1920, the Chinese Engineers’ Institute, which represented the interests of mechanics and engineers, demanded a 40% pay rise due to post-war inflation. When their demand was not met, 9,000 of them left Hong Kong for Canton. Eventually, employers agreed to a 32.5% wage increase. In 1922, a seamen’s riot led to the Emergency Regulation Ordinance. When the Chinese Seamen’s Union demanded a pay rise of up to 40%, 30,000 seamen joined the strike and prepared to leave Hong Kong. The government swiftly passed the Emergency Regulation Ordinance in a single day on 28 February 1922, granting the governor the power to censor or suppress written materials, arrest or deport individuals, control ports, and require people to resume work. In March, the Union won and employers agreed to pay increases ranging from 15 to 30%. In May 1925, another strike was organized by the General Labor Union and the Chinese Seamen’s Union in support of political events in China. Anti-colonial sentiment grew, leading

31 See Jung-fang Tsai 蔡榮芳, “The 1884 Hong Kong Insurrection: Anti-Imperialist Popular Protest During the Sino-French War,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 16, no.1 (2019): 8.

to boycotts of British goods, and “within just over a month, a quarter of a million strikers and their families” left for Canton.³² However, the strike ultimately failed, and peace was restored in October 1927.

Political and economic migration remained common in the interwar years. During World War II, when Japan invaded Hong Kong and China, many individuals chose to leave Hong Kong. Between December 1941 and August 1945, the government conducted “large-scale deportations of inhabitants” to address the food shortage problem. When Soviet officials came to Hong Kong in the 1940s, they observed that the poverty-stricken city was full of prostitutes, thieves, and ex-warlords. It was a place noted for “opium, prostitutes and displaced warlord émigrés.”³³ Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) and his journalist wife Martha Gellhorn (1908–1998) created a sensation when the famous couple honeymooned there in 1941.

3 Post-War Hong Kong

After the war, Hong Kong experienced another wave of inbound political migration as many Chinese decided to stay and become naturalized citizens. The second generation of immigrants often aligned with their Hong Kong identity rather than with their Shanghai, Fujian, Guangdong, or Chaozhou heritage. The ethnic composition of the population, with over 90% being Chinese, contributed to a melting pot phenomenon. Despite the use of the derogatory label “New Immigrants” for some individuals with poor education and limited Cantonese language skills, there existed a strong sense of socio-cultural solidarity among Hong Kong’s Chinese population. At the end of the war, the population was estimated to be only 600,000. However, by the end of 1947, the population “exceeded the pre-war peak to reach 1.8 million.”³⁴

In 1949, the establishment of the Communist regime in Mainland China triggered an influx of refugees into Hong Kong, leading to a population of 2.3 million by 1950. During the 1940s and 1950s, North Point became a settlement area for many Shanghaiese migrants, earning it the moniker “Little Shanghai.” However, in the 1960s, the influx of migrants from Fujian caused North Point to morph into “Little Fujian.” From 1951 to 1980, a quota system was implemented

32 Ibid., 371.

33 Michael Share, *The Soviet Union, Hong Kong, and the Cold War, 1945–1970* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, 2003), 5.

34 Fan, *The Population of Hong Kong*, 2.

to limit the number of immigrants. The 1962 famine in China led to a significant increase in outbound migration to Hong Kong. The *New York Times* reported that 140,000 refugees arrived in Hong Kong in 1962 alone, and approximately 1,160,000 individuals escaped from China to the colony between 1950 and 1963.³⁵ In the 1970s, many Chinese migrants from Chaozhou settled in Kowloon City. From 1974 to 1980, the government adopted a Touch Base Policy that automatically naturalized all Chinese illegal immigrants, resulting in an influx of migrants who obtained legal citizenship. Following Deng Xiaoping's (1904–1997) rise to power in 1980, the colonial government implemented a daily quota to 150 mainland immigrants, while the remaining individuals would be deported according to the Immediate Repatriation Policy. In 1996, nearly 40% of the population was born outside Hong Kong.³⁶

Politically, the colonial government refrained from actively promoting identification with the British, Communist, or Taiwanese regimes. Given Hong Kong's geographical proximity to Taiwan and China, and the growing divide between the Soviet Union and the PRC government after the 1960s, the British government and expatriate companies were apprehensive about Hong Kong becoming a battleground between Communists and Nationalists, capitalists and socialists in the post-war era. Hong Kong was to maintain a Cold War stance rather than engaging in direct conflict. In response to riots that broke out in 1967, the government invoked the Emergency Regulation Ordinance. Anti-colonial sentiment among locals reached new heights as “young followers of Mao, clutching the Chairman's great works to their bosoms, besieged Government House” and “all Communist-owned buildings were placarded with anti-British slogans.”³⁷ Demonstrators sang songs from the Cultural Revolution, and bombs were discovered, resulting in 51 deaths, over 800 injuries, around 5,000 arrests, and 1,936 convictions. The Chinese government's decision not to cut off the water or food supplies to Hong Kong was interpreted by David Trench's administration (1964–1971) as a sign of non-support for the rioters. Eventually, peace was restored, and the decade-long Cultural Revolution led to another influx of population. The Emergency Regulation Ordinance was invoked once again during the 1973 oil crisis.

35 “Million Refugees From China Crowd Housing in Hong Kong,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 1964.

36 Kit Chun Lam and Pak Wai Liu, *Immigration and the Economy of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 1998), 1.

37 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 469.

4 A Majority-Minority City

In the 1980s, the number of non-Chinese migrants began to increase. However, the government's immigration policy leaned toward marginalization, and skin color played a role in granting naturalized citizenship. Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, political instability in Vietnam resulted in another influx of refugees. For humanitarian reasons, the colonial government emphasized the policy of segregation but also declared Hong Kong to be the "first port of asylum" for Vietnamese. Over the next 25 years, Hong Kong witnessed an unexpected arrival of 200,000 boat refugees who sailed across the South China Sea. These asylum-seekers hoped to find employment in Hong Kong. However, just as Western nations restricted their own policy of resettlement in the 1980s, many of these refugees did not receive refugee rights or amnesty in Hong Kong. Instead, they were detained in various closed camps, facing challenges such as poor sanitation, bad living conditions, and political conflicts among those from South and North Vietnam. Eventually, the colonial government negotiated with the Vietnamese government and implemented a repatriation scheme to forcibly deport refugees after 1984. Hong Kong revoked its status as a first port of asylum in 1998 and categorized Vietnamese into two groups: legal immigrants (political refugees), and illegal immigrants (economic refugees), with the latter facing repatriation. In the 2000s, the post-handover government prioritized granting citizenship to legal immigrants and locally-born second generation Vietnamese, emphasizing the importance of achieving "complete integration" with the local population.

In the 1990s, Hong Kong witnessed a significant influx of foreign domestic helpers employed to perform household chores. However, their limited rights and lack of permanent citizenship rendered their status precarious as they lived from contract to contract. The majority of these helpers come from countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, with a smaller number from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other nations. Often, these helpers received training and were acculturated to local customs before coming to work in Hong Kong, attaining a degree of instrumental solidarity with the local population. In 2021, the government released the "Thematic Household Survey Report no. 72," revealing that of the 355,700 households that hired helpers in 2019, 327,700 families employed foreign helpers, accounting for 92.2% of households.³⁸ Yet

38 The total number of foreign helpers was 399,320 in 2019. "The number of households employing domestic helpers increased from 212,500 in 2000 (or 10.1% among all households) to 355,700 in 2019/20 (13.4%). Among the households employing domestic helpers, the percentage of households employing foreign domestic helpers increased from 87.9%

the number kept growing, with Hong Kong being home to more than 390,000 helpers. As full-time workers, their monthly salary was typically set at around HK\$4,870 (approximately US\$623) in 2024. The remittances sent by foreign domestic helpers played a significant role in boosting their home economies. However, the situation of these workers in Hong Kong has attracted attention from human rights groups and non-governmental organizations. Foreign domestic helpers are vulnerable to exploitation by their employment agencies and sometimes their employers. They constantly face challenges such as limited choice regarding their work and living environment, lack of privacy, emotional and verbal abuse, racial discrimination, and sometimes sexual assault. In spite of these workers' daily interaction with local Chinese people, achieving cultural fusion is difficult due to language and cultural barriers.

The government in Hong Kong adopted a multicultural agenda that aimed at reducing tensions between Chinese and non-Chinese citizens. However, locals hold mixed feelings toward pluralism, especially when it involves first-world citizens and minority groups who strive to build a transnational community and advocate multi-ethnic solidarity or rights. While Hongkongers take pride in their international city and the presence of foreign residents, there can be a reluctance to fully accept others, regardless of their racial background. Whites are still considered more "valued" immigrants and colored communities "devalued immigrants."³⁹

During the early colonial era, Indians and Nepalese played active roles in the Hong Kong police and armed forces. As India and Pakistan achieved independence from Britain in 1947, this led to the migration of some Pakistanis to Hong Kong. In the 1990s, many Pakistani contractors were employed to work on the construction of the Hong Kong International Airport in Chek Lap Kok (1991–1998), and many chose to become naturalized citizens. By the end of the 20th century, Chungking Mansions became known as "Little India," while many Pakistanis now reside in Yuen Long and Kwai Chung.

Acculturation remains a goal for non-Chinese citizens, even though fusion tends to be easier for Chinese expatriates. Many Chaozhou people migrated to Thailand in the early years of the 20th century, and later, Thai-Chinese expatriates relocated to Hong Kong, particularly in Kowloon City in the 1990s.

in 2000 to 92.2% in 2019/20." See Census and Statistics Department, "Thematic Household Survey Report No.72," Social Survey Section, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, March 18, 2021, 15, https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/data/stat_report/product/C0000079/att/B11302722021XXXXB0100.pdf.

39 Annie Montreuil and Richard Y. Bourhis, "Majority Acculturation Orientations Toward Valued And Devalued Immigrants," 698.

The level of integration for different ethnic groups depends greatly on the gap between their home culture and Chinese culture. For many second-generation non-Chinese minorities born and raised in Hong Kong, linguistic, cultural, and religious barriers remain an issue. The failure of assimilation can impact their employability, and not all primary or secondary schools cater to ethnic minority students.

Under colonial rule, the educational system in Hong Kong largely followed the Western model. Many schools were operated by diverse missionary bodies representing various nationalities, including Italians (Sacred Heart Canossian College [est. 1860], St Mary's Canossian College [est. 1900]), French (St Joseph's College [est. 1875], La Salle College [est. 1932]), Americans (Maryknoll Convent School [est. 1925], Marymount School [est. 1927]), and British (Ying Wa Girls' School [est. 1900]). The learning of English was greatly emphasized because as an official language, English was a status marker and a symbol of political elitism while for local people, English proficiency often translated into better employability and higher salaries rather than identification with a British outlook.

In the post-handover period, the Hong Kong government's cultural policy shifted towards decolonization and stronger assimilationism in order to strengthen nationalism and the alignment with the pan-Chinese identity. The (then) Education Department mandated many English-medium secondary schools to use Chinese as the medium of instruction (aside from English lessons), leaving only 100 schools that preserved English medium instruction in 1998–1999. After 14 schools appealed the decision, the number rose to 114. From 2010 to 2022, the (now) Education Bureau introduced three rounds of “Fine-Tuning the Medium of Instruction Policy,” with the number of schools maintaining English-medium instruction remaining below 120.

5 Political and Economic Changes

Hong Kong has achieved remarkable success in economic alignment with the global market, driven by the concerted efforts of the government and its people. “The manufacturing industry alone absorbed 476,000 workers in 1961 and 686,000 workers in 1971, about 40 per cent of Hong Kong's working population.”⁴⁰ Plastic manufacturing, particularly the production of plastic flowers at home, emerged as an important sector. By 1962, the Hong Kong plastic flowers

40 Fan, *The Population of Hong Kong*, 33.

industry had blossomed into “997 factories employing over 30,000 workers and generating HK\$300 million in revenues. By 1961, the total export value exceeded HK\$823 million, which represented over 12 percent of HK’s industrial output. The flowers were exported to 101 countries.”⁴¹ Li Ka-shing (b.1928) started a plastics factory making petals and stems in 1950 and went on to become one of the wealthiest local tycoons. Toy manufacturing was also important. Law Cho-yiu 羅祖耀 (1922–2015) made plastic toys in the 1950s and led “trade delegations that opened up international markets,” filling American and other households with toys with the sticker “Made in British Hong Kong.” By 1970, the “textile industry employed 30 percent of the work force and produced 40 percent of total exports. Plastics accounted for 12% of exports; electronics 10 percent.”⁴²

In the 1980s, Hong Kong underwent significant economic changes as China adopted “the Open Door Policy” under Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平. Many local manufacturing industries relocated to mainland China to benefit from cheaper land and labor costs, resulting in a decline in the manufacturing economy. In response, Hong Kong swiftly shifted its focus to different key service industries: trading and logistics, financial services, tourism, and retail, food, hospitality, and personal services (such as pet services, the beauty business, or home services). The colony also emerged as an international fundraising center for China. The internet, which arrived in Hong Kong in the 1990s, further propelled growth, with the IT sector increasing from 62,098 employees (including freelancers) in 2004 to 95,780 in 2016, a 54.2% rise, with a particular focus on software development, operation services, sales, and marketing.⁴³

Politically, the tumultuous pre-1997 period mimicked the tense custody negotiations between two partners in conflict in spite of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, leaving many Hong Kong people feeling marginalized and disenfranchised in the process. As a result, a significant

41 York Lo, “The Forgotten Jewish American Tycoons Behind the HK Plastic Flowers Industry,” Industrial History of Hong Kong Group, 18 December 2017, <https://industrialhistory.hk.org/the-forgotten-jewish-american-tycoons-behind-the-hk-plastic-flowers-industry>.

42 Robert A. Peterson, “Lesson in Liberty: Hong Kong, Crown Jewel of Capitalism,” *Foundation of Economic Education*, 1 January 1990, <https://fee.org/articles/lessons-in-liberty-hong-kong-crown-jewel-of-capitalism>.

43 See Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, “Hong Kong IT Manpower,” Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, OGCIO, 2022, [https://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/our_work/business/industry_support/ict_manpower/student_it_corner/career_corner/hk_it_manpower/#::~:~:text=The%20labour%20market%20in%20the,\(62%20098%20IT%20employees\)](https://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/our_work/business/industry_support/ict_manpower/student_it_corner/career_corner/hk_it_manpower/#::~:~:text=The%20labour%20market%20in%20the,(62%20098%20IT%20employees).).

number of Hongkongers applied for British National Overseas Passports between 1987 and 1997, and a considerable migration wave saw 335,646 Hongkongers move to Canada between 1984 and 1997. This outbound migration raised concerns about a potential brain drain. As Professor Siu-lun Wong 黃紹倫 notes, “people in Hong Kong may not be keen to cast” a ballot, but they “are not shy to vote with their feet.”⁴⁴ Though the 1997 handover was handled by a Joint Liaison Group, deep disagreements persisted between the two governments. Meanwhile, the British leaders wished to expedite political decolonization.

Among Hongkongers, there were rising divisions between left-leaning libertarians and right-wing conservatives. Liberals advocated greater democracy, while conservatives looked to Beijing for guidance. In China, Lu Ping 魯平 (1927–2015), the Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, discussed the Sino-British disputes with a clear analogy, stating that “If two women cannot live amicably with the same man, one of them must set up another cooking stove.” With Hong Kong holding “some £45 [billion in] foreign exchange reserves”⁴⁵ and caught in the middle of the conflict, concerns escalated among the population.

The concept of “One Country, Two Systems” aptly captured the elegance of compass (con)fusions, championing Hong Kong capitalism and Chinese socialism, local administrative autonomy and the Central Government’s dominance. In the post-handover period, though the Beijing government invested greatly to ensure Hong Kong’s economic success, locals continued to feel politically alienated and under-represented. Their identification with Western ideas such as democracy and universal suffrage led to protests in 2003, 2014, and 2019. Meanwhile, the Beijing government aimed to foster a co-prosperity sphere in the Pearl River Delta, later expanding to the Greater Bay Area, and sought regional integration across Belt and Road (B&R) countries. However, in 2003, half a million Hongkongers protested against the proposed national security legislation. By 2013, the “pan-democrats vs. localists” had “become the main manifestation of the moderate-radical divide in Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement.”⁴⁶

Conflicts resurfaced in 2014 when it became apparent that, despite Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy granted by the Basic Law, universal suffrage

44 Siu-lun Wong 黃紹倫, “Emigration and Stability in Hong Kong,” *Asian Survey* 31 no. 10 (1992): 918.

45 Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, 552, 562.

46 Francis Lee, “Solidarity in the Anti-Extradition Bill movement in Hong Kong,” *Critical Asian Studies* 52.1 (2020): 20.

was consistently denied to the people. That year, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (全國人大常委會)—a legislative body of the National People's Congress of PRC (全國人民代表大會)—decided that universal suffrage could be granted on condition that: (1) nominees must secure over 50% support from a nomination committee (formed in the same way as the 1200-member Election Committee appointed by the mainland government); (2) the shortlisted nominees must be narrowed down to no more than three; and (3) the Chief Executive must ultimately be appointed by the Central People's Government.

This decision sparked the 2014 “Umbrella Movement” or the “Occupy Central Movement,” a four-month sit-in street protest that lasted from September to December 2014. Unlike Occupy Wall Street (2011) in the West, which focused on economic inequality and the grievances of “the 99%,” the 2014 protests, when over 1.2 million people took to the streets, highlighted Hongkongers’ political orientation. Initially, the discontent was directed at the pro-Beijing government and its “filtered” notion of democracy. As protesters occupied main roads and shopping districts, this led to the closure of schools and businesses and the escalation of conflicts between police and protesters. Months passed, and the ending was fairly anticlimactic: the leaders turned themselves in, and the occupiers gradually dispersed with little resistance. The 2014 protests achieved no substantial results but greatly accelerated political polarization—the pro-government blue camp (藍絲) versus the pro-democracy yellow camp (黃絲). The pro-government camp saw that protesters as disrespecting the rule of law, colluding with foreign forces, and jeopardizing the stability of the Hong Kong economy.

Hong Kong became embroiled in conflict once again when the Security Bureau introduced amendments to the extradition laws in April 2019. The proposed bill, which allowed for extraditions to mainland China, triggered political neurosis not only among local citizens but also among foreign parties. The Legislative Council was stormed by protesters, and other significant events such as conflicts between thugs and protesters in Yuen Long (元朗), the occupation of the airport, vandalism at the highly symbolic Xinhua News Agency (新華社), sabotage of shops and train stations, the suspension of classes in schools, and the suspicious deaths of several young persons unfolded. Different media outlets reported these incidents with varying perspectives, further exacerbating societal divisions.

To ensure long-term prosperity and stability, the government stressed the importance of aligning the Hong Kong society to the spirit of nationalism. The National Security Law and the National Anthem Ordinance were implemented in Hong Kong in July 2020. The National Security Law “limits local judges’

independence,” while the “Chief Executive is empowered to select a limited panel of judges from among current and retired judges to try national security cases.”⁴⁷ A year later, 88,000 people applied for the British National (Overseas) visa, and another 80,000 decided to move abroad, marking a new wave of emigration.⁴⁸ In the same year, the National People’s Congress introduced further electoral reforms in Hong Kong, modifying the Election Committee, which was responsible for electing the Chief Executive and some Legislative Council members. A vetting mechanism was established to screen all candidates running for the Election Committee, the Chief Executive, and the Legislative Council. Additionally, the education sector was urged to prioritize the promotion of patriotic education. In 2023, the District Council Reform enabled the government to strengthen administrative control, with council members being either government-appointed or elected through direct or indirect elections. All council members must be vetted by the Candidate Eligibility Review Committee.

In addition to strong political alignment with the PRC government, the Hong Kong government also streamlines the economic alignment with the business sectors in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The GBA concept was initially introduced in March 2015 as a component of China’s national strategic planning, aiming to reinforce the Chinese government’s commitment to reform and openness. Citizens are encouraged to embrace the freedom to relocate to Mainland China for career opportunities, or remain in Hong Kong to collaborate with Mainland institutions and professionals, or utilize high-speed trains to spend weekends in China. However, the implementation of the GBA is expected to face challenges due to the differences in economic systems between Hong Kong, Macao (another special administrative region involved in the scheme), and Mainland cities. Additionally, there are concerns that China’s top-down state-driven policies may result in discrepancies in the development of city regions, impacting stakeholder needs and creating market uncertainty within the GBA integration.⁴⁹

47 Michael C. Davis and Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “Beijing’s National Security Law Brings Mainland Repression to Hong Kong,” *The Diplomat*, 3 July 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/beijings-national-security-law-brings-mainland-repression-to-hong-kong>.

48 Anita Kit Wa Chan, Lewis T.O. Cheung, Eric King-man Chong, Man Yee Karen Lee, and Mathew Y.H. Wong, “Hong Kong’s New Wave of Migration: Socio-political Factors of Individuals’ Intention to Emigrate,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 49 (2022): n.p. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00323-y>.

49 Wu, Edmund, Danny Ho, Stephen Ng, Lawrence Leung. “Uniqueness, complexities, and research issues of logistics and trade facilitation in Greater Bay Area of China,” *Journal of Shipping and Trade* 8 (2023): 8–21.

In contrast to the European Union, whose members are from different countries and lack a coordinating entity beyond their sovereign governments, all the cities in the GBA belong to Mainland China and are coordinated by the central government. Consequently, the GBA can emulate the high standards and good practices of the European Union while avoiding the pitfalls associated with a lack of coordination within the European Union. It is for this reason that bankers, immigration officers, and businessmen strive to give Hongkongers the maximum amount of negative freedom, or freedom from inconveniences and hassles, as they work or enjoy life in China.

Socially, the message is that all citizens must toe the line, and a failed or negative alignment with the law will lead to trouble. As of “January 5th, 2024, 286 people have been arrested and 68 convicted in relation to national security crimes.”⁵⁰ In March of the same year, the Hong Kong Legislative Council passed the Safeguarding National Security bill and “expanded the scope of national security-related laws” and included “new offenses such as insurrection, external interference, sabotage, and most significantly: ‘Doing an act in relation to a computer or electronic system without lawful authority and endangering national security.’”⁵¹ When the law fails to catch or punish wrongdoers, a doxing website HKLEAKS (香港解密) can discipline the unpatriotic offenders. The website targeted over “2,000 journalists and pro-democracy advocates” and revealed their “private information and other identifying data” online. University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab stated that it is highly likely that HKLEAKS was a non-organic campaign created by pro-PRC groups,” noting that “doxxing can be a fairly low risk but potentially high-reward instrument of digital repression.”⁵² The HKLEAKS had been shut down multiple times, but each time it would resume operations under a different domain name until the website shut down in June 2023. While some people claim that the old Hong Kong is no more, the government condemns all “scaremongering” critics, noting that the iron hand or the law “only targets an extremely small minority of people who endanger national security.”⁵³

On a different note, the Chinese government’s global alignment strategy emphasizes both inclusivity and exclusivity: the Belt and Road Scheme

50 Tin Pak, “Internet Censorship and Digital Surveillance Under Hong Kong’s National Security Law,” *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, March 28, 2024, <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/internet-censorship-and-digital-surveillance-under-hong-kongs-national-security-law/13/34>.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Amy Hawkins and Helen Davidson, “‘The Old Days Are No More’: Hong Kong Goes Quiet As Security Laws Tighten Their Grip,” *The Guardian*, 12 April, 2024.

advertises an international, inclusive outlook. At the same time, the new legislation indicates the problem of “colluding with external elements” as the Safeguarding National Security bill links external elements to “international organizations,” and organizations “in an external place that pursues political ends.”⁵⁴ In addition, there is an ambivalent relationship between the government and foreign organizations: China blocked Google and Meta for failing to comply with domestic censorship policies, but these big firms can still freely operate in Hong Kong. Google and Meta have confidence in their global policies but not all foreign companies share the same level of optimism. In March 2024, “Radio Free Asia, a US-funded media outlet, closed its Hong Kong bureau, citing fears for staff safety because of Article 23.” And at least “90 NGOs and 22 media groups have closed since the 2020 national security law, according to the Centre for Asian Law at Georgetown University.”⁵⁵

6 Conclusion

Hong Kong’s evolution from a small fishing village and pirate capital to colony, a migrant society, and now a special administrative region of China has been shaped by various disruptive forces. These changes give rise to what Abbas calls a “hyphenation” of identity because Hongkongers love to idealize both autonomy and dependency, conservatism and democracy, tradition and innovation, Chineseness and foreignness, depending on different contexts.⁵⁶ Given the city’s history of diverse (conflicting) alignments, it remains uncertain whether Hong Kong should single out only one rigorous compass to reconcile people’s multiple orientations. In the 21st century, a prudent and flexible realignment strategy should focus on navigating and negotiating the political, social, and cultural divides. Given Hong Kong’s unique political and historical context, its identity must never be static, but fluid and multifaceted. Hong Kong’s challenge is to balance different dichotomies and foster a sense of unity without erasing its distinctiveness, hence policymakers and stakeholders may wish to engage in continuous dialogue to address the evolving needs and aspirations of Hongkongers. Ultimately, only time will tell whether Hong Kong will witness greater assimilation, integration, fusion, alienation, or alternation in the coming years. Hong Kong has adapted to changing circumstances in the past, and

54 Pak, “Internet Censorship and Digital Surveillance.”

55 Ibid.

56 Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance*, 142.

the future will be a testament to showcase Hongkongers' resilience in the face of ongoing challenges.

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Digital Hong Kong and Surveillance Capitalism

Magdalen Ki

1 Introduction

In the age of the digital economy, Hong Kong has aligned successfully with the development of global techno-capitalism. Data is said to be the “new oil” because of its high value; yet big data and artificial intelligence have the potential to improve the quality of life as well as promote digital authoritarianism. This chapter explores the links between surveillance capitalism, digital technology, and what I call the new “cyber-pastoral” dynamics in Hong Kong.

My argument showcases the fourfold development of this dynamic. First of all, the relationship between big techs and people can pastor a new variant of the master-slave dialectic. Second, given that the digital revolution spearheads “a managerial revolution” (to use the words of James Burnham), data is often streamed in order to monitor citizens and workers.¹ The result is that constant data-analytics beats psychoanalysis, leading to an awkward analyst-analysand tension in the workplace and paranoia in public domains. Third, due to affordable surveillance technology, urban dwellers often develop a digital doppelganger, and humans suddenly become their worst enemies when they must curate their digital doubles only to witness how their doubles come to haunt and hunt them. Fourth, sousveillance—the decentered, bottom-up approach to capturing data—can democratize surveillance and empower individual agency. However, the rise of selfies, influencers, and the fan economy often intensifies the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic side of surveillance as people do not mind exposing their intimate details and may even start a channel to monetize their personal life. All in all, the ubiquity of surveillance capitalism leads to two responses in Hong Kong: on the one hand, tech-savvy users welcome hypervigilance and are interested in anti-surveillance measures. On the other hand, the general population displays what Barry Brown calls the “privacy paradox: people are aware of privacy issues, but they are also “willing to lose that privacy for very little gain.”² Between hypervigilance and total acceptance of

1 James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day Co., 1941), 190.

2 Barry Brown, “Studying the Internet Experience,” Hewlett Packard, 2001, <https://www.hpl.hp.com/techreports/2001/HPL-2001-49.pdf>.

boundless surveillance, I argue that clear information, customized design, and informed choices are important in the age of networked technology.

Tjerk Timan, Maša Galič, and Bert-Jaap Koops observe that the history of surveillance studies consists of three stages.³ Bentham's Panopticon and Foucault's panopticism typify the first stage. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) designed several panopticons, including the “prison-Panopticon” and the “pauper-Panopticon” to maximize the coercive power of the observer and ensure that marginalized underlings would be monitored. His “chrestomathic-Panopticon” is meant for educational purposes. The schoolmaster can monitor students without being seen.⁴ On a different note, Michel Foucault (1926–1984) argues that panopticism is the modern way of building a disciplinary society. The new model implies that “factories, schools, barracks, hospitals ... all resemble prisons.”⁵ Coercion is not needed when the normalizing disciplines make people watch themselves automatically. Nevertheless, Foucault argues that resistance is possible because people can always “game” the system and “cope with surveillance” by hiding or “changing their behavior.”⁶

The second stage highlights a Deleuzian, post-panoptical, deterritorialized model of surveillance. Big techs manage multiple gadgets and rhizomatic networks to collect data and push notifications in thousands of platforms. The post-panoptical surveillance tactic is omnipresent, omniscient, and manipulative. The point is not to generate fear or discipline but to maximize profits in a transparent society. Users are free to make choices and subscribe to a “to each his own” outlook. However, big techs easily reduce all individuals to data points, or what Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) calls “*dividuals*,” to generate dividends for themselves.⁷

The third stage champions a hetero-optical society, ranging from the use of “*alternative opticons*, *sousveillance*, and *participatory surveillance*.”⁸ Given the availability of cheap surveillance technologies such as IP cameras, drones, and dashcams, Steve Mann (2004) coined the term “*sousveillance*” to reflect how

3 Tjerk Timan, Maša Galič, and Bert-Jaap Koops, “Surveillance Theory and its Implications for Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Law and Regulation of Technology*, eds. Roger Brownsword, Eloise Scotford, and Karen Yeung (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 731–753.

4 *Ibid.*, 733.

5 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 228.

6 Julia Angwin, *Dragnet Nation: A Quest for Privacy, Security, and Freedom in a World of Relentless Surveillance* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 2014), 41.

7 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 50 (1992): 5, emphasis original.

8 Timan et al., “Surveillance Theory and its Implications for Law,” 746, emphasis original.

modern people are not only watched but also participate as active watchers.⁹ Anders Albrechtslund further argues that “participatory surveillance” is dominant in the internet culture. While the tech giants watch us, “the traditional hierarchical surveillance concept” is supplemented by different aspects of “mutuality” as we also watch others and actively invite others to watch us. The process heightens “user empowerment, subjectivity building, and information sharing.”¹⁰ More “views” and “likes” mean social validation, and the monetization of views enables what David Lyon calls “panopti-commodity.”¹¹

For its part, banopticon (Didier Bigo’s word) highlights a different, reterritorialized pattern of surveillance. The banopticon was a response to the 9/11 attack and emphasizes the importance of data transparency to increasing security and control. To achieve these goals, the authorities track people and restrict citizens’ data rights en masse. The banopticon is characterized by “the exceptionalism of power.”¹² The “new normal” means that people accept the state’s blanket policy of executing data control and surveillance or computing social scores. Peer surveillance is also justified in the informant culture. When in doubt, people are taught to report on others: “If you see something, say something.”¹³

In that regard, surveillance capitalism “departs from the history of market capitalism in surprising ways, demanding both unimpeded freedom and total knowledge.”¹⁴ Previously, the barter economy relied on the exchange of goods, and the market economy relied on the law of supply and demand, production, and pricing. However, surveillance capitalists invent tools and provide services to clients; in exchange, they obtain data, and use it or commodify it in various

9 Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, “Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments,” *Surveillance & Society* 1, no. 3 (2003): 331–355.

10 Anders Albrechtslund, “Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance,” *First Monday* 13, no. 3 (2008), www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2142/1949.

11 David Lyon, “The Search for Surveillance Theories,” in *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, ed. David Lyon (Portland: Willan Publishing, 2006), 8.

12 Didier Bigo, “Globalized (In)Security: The Field and the Ban-Opticon,” in *Terror, Insecurity, and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes After 9/11*, eds. Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala (New York: Routledge, 2008), 32.

13 “If You See Something, Say Something” is a tagline used by Homeland Security in the US to raise “public awareness of the indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime as well as the importance of reporting suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement.” See “If You See Something, Say Something,” Homeland Security, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/SeeSay-Overview508_1.pdf.

14 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2018), 21, Kindle.

ways. For example, users do not have to pay to use Gmail or Facebook, but Google and Meta acquire users' data to improve their products and predict future market niches, and tech firms may become tools for governments to obtain users' data. Shoshana Zuboff thus characterizes surveillance capitalism as a "new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales." It is a "rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history," and its "foundational framework" emphasizes "a surveillance economy" that asserts dominance over humans and presents "startling challenges to market democracy." Surveillance capitalism is "best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty."¹⁵

2 Cyber-Pastorship: Panoptical Masters and Addictive Slaves

The internet arrived in Hong Kong in the 1990s and OpenAI launched ChatGPT in 2022. The advent of digital capitalism means that like the rest of the world, Hong Kong is trapped in a world of what I call "cyber-pastorship." In the business sector, big techs create and sell new products or services and dictate the terms of use to their users; however, people love their gadgets so much that they enjoy being (mis)guided and becoming addictive slaves. Big techs give people choices and (subscription) plans, but their cyber-pastoral power is "essentially concerned with answering the question" of how to boost the economy, that is, the "correct manner of managing" political or economic information, "individuals, goods and wealth" in a society.¹⁶ At some point, the choice can be a false one when big techs "lure" users to agree to certain terms and conditions, "feed" them (mis)information, "guide" them to view unsolicited ads, click baits, or "prompt" them to visit unknown websites, view pop-ups, or download cookies. In the public sector, the government purchases expensive software and computer systems to push new feeds, monitor administrative effectiveness, and increase organizational efficiency. As a result, the post-panoptical model of surveillance is multicentered, multi-platformed, and rhizomatic. There is a shift "from a disciplinary to a control society" that operates in the guise of a user-friendly bot or assistant.¹⁷

15 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Kindle.

16 Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3, Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 207.

17 Timan et al., "Surveillance Theory and its Implications for Law," 734–735.

Hong Kong users are happy slaves due to their internet addiction. Many own multiple devices and champion the use of advanced technology. In April 2023, a woman was visibly upset after learning that her husband relied on ChatGPT to name their soon-to-be-born baby. She accused him of being “too lazy” to think up something original, not caring if “it’s AI who’s the father of the baby or him who’s the father.”¹⁸ People are addicted to online sources for different reasons. A J.P. Morgan 2019 study of Hong Kong reckoned that internet penetration was high, at 89.4%, reaching 93.1% in 2023.¹⁹ In 2021, the population of Hong Kong was 7.5 million, of whom 4.5 million were online shoppers. “Travel, health and beauty, and consumer electronics” are top e-commerce categories, and 75% of online shoppers love global commerce, with cross-border spending the highest at 60%, or US\$2.2 billion in sales.²⁰ The 2017 census indicated that the average Hong Konger spent about 30 hours per week working alone at a computer. Possibly due to COVID-19, a different study revealed that Hong Kong people used the internet for about 7 hours and 15 minutes daily and spent close to two hours on social media in 2020.²¹ YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook rank as the top three social network sites, with penetration rates of 86.9%, 83.6%, and 83%, respectively.²²

Bruce Schneier notes how the “ubiquity” of surveillance capitalism enables the rise of an “internet surveillance state.”²³ A smart home champions the Internet of Things, with webcams, curtains, door locks, even the rice cooker can all become interlinked and remote-controlled. Users can subscribe to a monthly plan for cloud storage, with the result that all the devices, activities, habits, and preferences of dwellers become trackable and transparent. Revenues for the smart home market in Hong Kong were US\$98.51 million in 2019,

18 Ruth Yeo, “‘Too Lazy’ Hong Kong Man Upsets Wife by Asking ChatGPT to Name Baby,” *Today*, April 12, 2023, <https://www.todayonline.com/world/trending-chapgpt-hong-kong-baby-name-wife-lazy-husband-2149456>.

19 “E-Commerce Payments Trends: Hong Kong,” J.P. Morgan, 2019, <https://www.jpmorgan.com/merchant-services/insights/reports/hong-kong>.

20 Ibid.

21 Lai Lin Thomala, “Average Daily Time Spent on Digital Media in Hong Kong as of 3rd Quarter 2020, By Type,” Statista, May 28, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/694339/hong-kong-daily-online-minutes-type/#:~:text=As%20of%20the%20third%20quarter,about%206.9%20million%20internet%20users>.

22 Thomala, “Penetration Rate of Leading Social Networks in Hong Kong as of 3rd Quarter 2020,” Statista, March 26, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/412500/hk-social-network-penetration>.

23 Bruce Schneier, “Our Internet Surveillance State,” Schneier on Security, Schneier, March 25, 2013, https://www.schneier.com/blog/archives/2013/03/our_internet_su.html.

growing to US\$118.8 million in 2020 and US\$134.26 million in 2021.²⁴ In 2017, the government further released the “Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint,” and in 2020 the “Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 2.0.” The six categories (Smart Mobility, Smart Living, Smart Environment, Smart People, Smart Government, Smart Economy) all highlight the wider use of biometric technology, automation and video analytics, and Internet of Things technologies in the future. For example, the use of AI and robotics can assist the detection of hill fires in country parks. The Blueprint also mentions the use of a Big Data Analytics Platform, the development of a government-wide Internet of Things Network, the development of an Electronic Submission Hub, and a new Investigation Easy Systems designed to handle immigration issues. It goes without saying that none of this could happen without support from the commercial sector, in particular, computer manufacturers, software companies, and companies that make and market wireless routers, security systems, CCTV cameras, microchip products, sensors, scanners, diagnostic tools, code readers, and so on.

Hongkongers welcome digital capitalism with open arms and tend to sideline the fourfold problems of corporate dictatorship, surplus capital, user helplessness, and labor exploitation, all of which hint at a master-slave dialectic. The first problem refers to the fact that all devices, applications, software, and digital assistance come with specific terms and conditions dictated by different corporate policies. Users have the choice to disagree, but disagreement means not having a virtual life. Given the limited number of search engines and social media, Zuboff points out the problem of “inevitabilism,” especially for those who are not tech savvy or information poor.²⁵

In Hong Kong, the top six platforms have remained consistent over the years: Google, YouTube, Facebook, Yahoo!, Wikipedia, and Instagram.²⁶ In many situations, acceptance is a matter of forced choice. Local university staff and students often rely on official apps such as Google or Microsoft 365 to access their email system. If people want to communicate with their friends or relatives in China, the only platform is WeChat. Snowden observes that even though users are asked to agree to a long list of terms and conditions, the opaque terminology is designed to obfuscate and exploit the public. “All of our data is being mismanaged and mishandled and misappropriated by companies around the

24 Jeremiah Lasquety-Reyes, “Smart Home-Revenue Forecast in Hong Kong from 2017–2025,” Statista, June 15, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/887535/revenue-in-the-smart-home-market-in-hong-kong>.

25 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Kindle.

26 “Top Websites Ranking,” Similarweb, April, 2024, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/hong-kong>.

world.” Users “have consented to the creation of perfect records” about their “private lives by a thousand companies and industries” they “don’t know” and they “don’t even pay.” In the case of e-commerce, users “don’t have a vote over” those companies that “might not even be in [the same] country.”²⁷

The second problem is linked to big techs’ possession of surplus capital and data. Economically, trade thrives on the principle of reciprocity, but “freeware” often means that “[s]urveillance capitalists know everything about us, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable to us. They accumulate vast domains of new knowledge from us, but not for us.”²⁸ They are enriched at multiple levels: first, they gain *information capital*. In Hong Kong, money-related apps such as Google Pay, HSBC PayMe, WeChat, and Taobao often require users to verify their identity by scanning official documents. An identification verification check may involve a photo, personal details (birthday, gender, address), banking information, credit card numbers, and biometric information. Users are often clueless as to whether or not they become a part of a data tracking plan. VPN service Surfshark analyzed 200 apps in 2021 and found that Messenger, Facebook, Instagram, LINE, PayPal, Amazon Shopping, and LinkedIn were the top “data-hungry apps.”²⁹ In the US, one reporter “used a tool called Collusion to track who was tracking him” and found that “105 companies tracked his internet use during one 36-hour period.”³⁰

Second, capitalists can increase their *business capital* when customized information is sent to clients through online or offline platforms to increase sales and business opportunities. Many local chain stores invite customers to download their free app to collect reward points and later bombard them with emails and notifications about new products and discounts. Third, capitalists are enriched by *network capital*. Clients’ information can be monetized or simply shared with other data brokers or retail partners. A 2018 study conducted by Oxford University revealed that an average app sends client data to about ten companies on average, and this is allowed because “the business model is primarily enabled through ‘third-party’ trackers.”³¹ Finally, big techs enjoy what Zuboff calls surplus “*surveillance capital*” because they can have easy access to

27 Edward Snowden, “I’m Scared to Make This Public!” Inner Vision, June 16, 2021, YouTube video, 10:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QixqhSBFjIY>.

28 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Kindle.

29 “Uncovering the Apps that Actually Respect Your Privacy,” Surfshark, 2021, <https://surfshark.com/apps-that-track-you>.

30 Schneier, “Our Internet Surveillance State.”

31 Reuben Binns et al., “Third Party Tracking in the Mobile Ecosystem,” *WebSci 18: Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science*, May 2018, 23–31, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1804.03603.pdf>.

their users' credit information, browsing behavior, location data, photos, video, and audio files. They are surveilling us, but no one is surveilling them.

The third problem highlights user helplessness and lack of control. When users download an app, they often skip the small print and quickly click "I agree." Yet the data policies of Instagram and Facebook state that these companies can record and track users' personal information, use and share the information with third parties, and have access to users' camera and microphone. In turn, "users do not know what data companies collect on them, where that information is stored, if it is stored securely, or to which companies that information might be sold." Moreover, when "additional third parties" sell information to "additional third parties," users do "not consent to this level of selling."³² For their part, surveillance capitalists can have *historical knowledge* of users' status (marital status, education, age, sexual orientation) and buying power. They also have *instrumental knowledge* of users' current needs, preferences, brand choices, and shopping behavior. Finally, they can have *predictive knowledge* of what content or product to create and what to sell because they have access to users' wish lists. They can send questionnaires, surveys, and gather information "to nudge, coax, tune, and herd" people to generate "profitable outcomes."³³

Marketers call this the "creep factor," but creep can heighten what Joost Meerloo (1903–1976)—a medical doctor and psychoanalyst—calls "menticide," or the rape and killing of the mind due to an "organized system of psychological intervention."³⁴ Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, a law firm, released a Survey of the Retail Industry's Privacy Practices in 2019 and noted that "[r]etailers deploy, on average, 23.8 behavioral advertising cookies on their homepages."³⁵ Based on people's own cookies or web history, attention engineers then create algorithms and send users ad-saturated content, or they push certain posts to the top of people's news feed and send out more notifications and ads. As noted by Conger, "Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Reddit, Netflix, and others" can create "addictive cycles" that "alter your perceptions,

32 Elizabeth Bames, "Privacy Behaviors, Surveillance, and Public Policy" (MA Thesis, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, 2020), 28, 29.

33 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Kindle.

34 Joost Meerloo, *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1956), 14.

35 David Zetoon, "Survey of the Retail Industry's Privacy Practices," Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, December 2019, 2, <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/survey-of-the-retail-industry-s-privacy-32836>.

change your mental effectiveness.”³⁶ It is nothing short of mind control or predictive programming; the point is that it is no longer enough to bombard users with (unwanted) information; the new goal is to pastor users, push them to subscribe to certain “feeds,” guide them to curate “personalized” content, lure them to click “likes,” and welcome even more “notifications.”

Rob Braxman, an IT entrepreneur, argues that big techs are fully geared to practice an exploitative economy. The approach used by “Google and Facebook and other platforms” is that they “offer their stuff for free,” so people justify “selling of personal data as a necessary evil.”³⁷ However, the latest approach is that a client willingly pays for the device in question, subscribes to a (monthly) plan for cloud storage, and the big techs “steal your network, utilize your own device,” and then “sell the services back to you. The approach is to crowdsource the network” and expand the “capability of big tech” without spending much on information infrastructure.³⁸ For example, from the moment of birth, parents love to buy gadgets for their babies. A baby’s data is captured as baby wearables and babycams as baby monitoring devices collect information via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi technologies. However, surveillance footage in the cloud often requires a fee. In the case of Amazon’s Alexa, the device is always listening and the data is stored in cloud servers. In exchange for convenience, users become vulnerable to privacy loss, the risk of third-party tracking, data leakage, hacking, or predatory marketing. People may find it creepy that when they utter a word at home, they soon see related ads in their mailbox or social media accounts.

A fourth problem is digital labor exploitation. Users often share a great deal of information online, including details about themselves (e.g. birthday parties, travel locations, hobbies). Many users perform cultural labor by providing free stories, videos, and vlogs to enrich the internet; instead of getting paid, they sometimes need to pay for the domain they use. A number of platforms (YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram) allow users to monetize their content. However, YouTube contributors can be rewarded very differently according to genre, a video’s watch time, length, viewer demographics, and ad-placement strategies. One interview shows that while six contributors all

36 J.Z. Congor, “Attention Engineering: What it is, How it is Used, and Why Warfighters Need it,” *Over the Horizon*, January 9, 2019, <https://othjournal.com/2019/01/09/attention-engineering-what-it-is-how-it-is-used-and-why-warfighters-need-it>.

37 Rox Braxman, “Skynet Went Live June 8! Attn: Alexa Echo and Ring Owners,” Rox Braxman Tech, June 11, 2021, YouTube Video, 20:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccrUAp4GQvY>.

38 Braxman, “Skynet Went Live June 8!” 11:40–46.

created a video with one million views, their earnings varied from US\$3,000 to 40,000. Viewers are usually forced to watch several ads before they can view the video, or they have to pay and get an upgrade to remove the ads.³⁹ YouTubers have limited rights because YouTube has community guidelines and can remove or demonetize videos for many reasons (such as “fake engagement,” “impersonation,” “harassment and cyberbullying,” “hate speech,” “harmful or dangerous content,” or “COVID-19 misinfo policy”).⁴⁰ There is no minimal wage in this kind of digital labor, and contributors are fully aware of their vulnerability. Tech firms also offer very limited protection when others plagiarize their concepts or jokes, translate their content into a different language, or upload their videos to other platforms.⁴¹ In addition, user accounts can be suddenly suspended, especially for reasons such as political or medical misinformation.

Hongkongers are aware of the problems of surveillance capitalism, AI (in)accuracy, and big tech oligarchy, but awareness does not mean action. In spite of constant data capture and occasionally inaccurate information given by Siri or ChatGPT, users trust and share personal information using AI tools. In a similar vein, Hong Kong’s Octopus is one of the world’s oldest smart card systems for making electronic payments, mostly for transport fares at first, but it soon spread to a wide range of shopping outlets and can also be used as a pass to enter schools and various other buildings.⁴² With over 20 million cards in circulation, it is a trusted payment platform. Those who wish to use an anonymous, unregistered Octopus card can choose to do so, but a personalized Octopus card will store username, date of birth, and ID card number and can be linked to an app (Octopus Wallet) or a bank card to enable users to easily top up its value. In July 2010, the company admitted selling 1.97 million customers’ personal data over four and a half years to half a dozen companies such as CIGNA, and another business partner, Card Protection Plan Limited.⁴³ Octopus Holdings Limited eventually donated the money made from data sales, or

39 Amanda Perelli, “How Much YouTube Pays for Views,” *Business Insider*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-youtube-pays-for-views-100-thousand-million-150-2020-1#1-million-views-between-3400-and-40000-6-creators-2>.

40 YouTube, “Community Guidelines,” YouTube.com, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/policies/community-guidelines>.

41 See Jonathan Bailey, “YouTube’s Plagiarism Problem,” *Plagiarism Today*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2018/04/27/youtubes-plagiarism-problem>.

42 Octopus, “About Octopus Cards,” Octopus, 2021, <https://www.octopus.com.hk/en/consumer/octopus-cards/about/index.html>.

43 “Media Statements: Investigation Report—Octopus Rewards Program,” PCPD, October 18, 2010, https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/news_events/media_statements/press_20101018.html.

HK\$44 million, to charity. Yet the scandal failed to hurt the card's popularity, and it still has the highest penetration rate, or 98%, of those aged 16–64 in 2024.

Insurance companies openly inform their clients regarding what will happen to their data. Yet the importance of being insured often trump many concerns, and privacy is seldom a deal breaker. For example, an insurance company can collect clients' "biometric, medical, and health/style data," location data, data from people who act for their clients, and data from "public sources." In turn, the company can share their clients' data with third parties that help the insurance company provide services to their clients, and those third parties clients give consent to share their data, with examples including "local or overseas law enforcement agencies, industry bodies, regulators or authorities," "payment recipients, beneficiaries or any person" acting for the customers, "hospitals, clinics, medical practitioners, laboratories, technicians, loss adjustors, risk intelligence providers, legal advisers or private investigators" working for the company, "partners and providers of reward, co-branding or loyalty programs, charities," and "social media advertising partners," etc.⁴⁴

Hongkongers are also aware that devices and laws created in other countries can affect their life, their rights, and their data privacy. In 2019, Facebook user data and phone numbers were leaked, and close to 3 million users in Hong Kong were affected.⁴⁵ In July 2019, Thomas le Bonniec, a former Apple contractor, became a whistleblower and warned that the devices are "wiretapping the entire populations," inactivated Siri was regularly recording users' conversations and sending data to Apple contractors, and there was no way for users to opt out. In October 2019, Apple formally allowed users to opt out of the Siri grading program and deleted all previously stored recordings.⁴⁶ Cirlig, a cybersecurity researcher in the US, found that his Xiaomi Redmi Note 8 was "watching much of what he was doing on the phone," from search history to URLs. This set of data was sent to remote servers hosted by Alibaba. The "incognito" mode and the encrypted transmission of data offered little protection, with Cirlig reporting that every encrypted "chunk of information" was "hidden with

44 "Data Privacy Notice," or "Personal Information Collection Statement," HSBC Life, *HSBC*, June 2020, <https://cdn.hsbc.com.hk/content/dam/hsbc/hk/docs/insurance/notice-relating-to-the-personal-data-privacy-ordinance.pdf>.

45 Tom Grundy, "Facebook User Data and Phone Numbers Leaked, Including 3 Million Users in Hong Kong," *Hong Kong Free Press*, April 4, 2021.

46 Alex Hern, "Apple Whistleblower Goes Public Over 'Lack of Action,'" *The Guardian*, May 20, 2020.

a form of easily crackable encoding, known as base64.”⁴⁷ In response, Xiaomi argued that browser information was anonymized and not linked to individual users. In 2020, Xiaomi announced that an update allowed customers to opt out of aggregated data collection. In 2021, WhatsApp updated its policy and allowed three apps—Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger—to access WhatsApp data such as phone numbers, IP addresses, mobile networks, internet service providers, and browser information. Many Hongkongers became worried. Signal suddenly “became the most downloaded messaging applications,” topping the charts in the Apple and Google mobile app stores in Hong Kong in 2020.⁴⁸

The government tackles the problem of surveillance capitalism in various ways. In 1995, the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDPO) was passed. Due to the Octopus incident, the PDPO was amended in 2012 with the aim of giving guidance to direct marketing and dealing with privacy challenges. There are guidelines on the purpose and manner of data collection and use, the duration of data retention, and data security. However, as noted by Stephen Kai-yi Wong 黃繼兒, a human rights lawyer, data controllers (capitalists) have a great many privileges.⁴⁹ Data controllers often ask for subjects’ consent by way of a single process. If data controllers use the service of a third party data processor, this is not regulated by PDPO even though data controllers are supposed to use contractual means to regulate and monitor the data processor.

Second, the “appointment of data protection officers and the conduct of privacy impact assessment” are recommended good practices only and are not mandatory, nor is a notification to the Privacy Commissioner in cases of data breach. Third, the Privacy Commissioner is “not empowered to impose administrative fines or penalties” but “may serve Enforcement Notices” on data controllers, and failure to comply with the requests may mean “penalties after judicial process.”⁵⁰ There are also no formal mechanisms to certify, recognize, or reward data controllers who demonstrate compliance with codes of good conduct. The Privacy Commissioner can advocate the “adoption of a privacy management program” and encourage data controllers to honor the accountability principle. In 2016, the Chief Personal Data Officer of the PCPD (Office of

47 Thomas Brewster, “Exclusive: Warning Over Chinese Mobile Giant Xiaomi Recording Million of People’s ‘Private’ Web and Phone Use,” *Forbes*, April 30, 2020.

48 See “Signal Messaging App Rockets Up Hong Kong Download Charts,” *The Straits Times*, July 8, 2020.

49 Stephen Wong, “EU GDPR and HK PDPO: What’s the Difference?” Hong Kong Lawyer, June 2018, <http://www.hk-lawyer.org/content/eu-gdpr-and-hk-pdpo-what%E2%80%99s-difference>.

50 Ibid.

the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data), Dr Henry Chang, simply emphasized that business should bear in mind “privacy by design” and target “data minimization,” “surprise minimization,” and “risk minimization,” and cultivate more “trust and respect.”⁵¹

In short, data subjects have limited rights. People have the right of access and correction regarding their own (e.g., medical, personal) data. They can expect that data will not be “retained longer than necessary,” but little specific information is given. Data subjects also have the right to opt out from direct marketing materials. In addition, they have no right to be forgotten. They cannot erase their data or limit access to their data kept by data controllers. Furthermore, users have no right to privacy in case of “crime prevention or prosecution, security and defense, statistics and research, [or] news activity,” especially if the data is “required or authorized by law or [a] court order,” or “for exercising or defending legal rights in Hong Kong.”⁵²

Even though people want to safeguard their privacy in much the same way as they protect their money, legal experts argue that the attempt to protect privacy rights as a property right may not work. Jessica Litman observes that the “raison d’être of property is alienability,” but the concept of alienable privacy or “alienable ownership rights in personal data is disturbing.”⁵³ In addition, laws may offer limited protection because when people click or sign “I agree,” they assign personal data of value to some business, knowing that the company may sell information to other businesses or share it with them. Operationally, online businesses are bound to share their clients’ data with third parties. For example, when an online seller obtains a customer’s order and credit card information, it must share it with the bank or a courier service. The digital economy is interlinked, so there may be no clear-cut solution. Still, Litman argues that consent “can be limited in scope,” otherwise it is a breach of trust if data controllers keep sharing their clients’ data.⁵⁴ Torin Monahan also points out that humans should not be “either as pawns to be manipulated or as receptacles of information that must be extracted.”⁵⁵

51 Quoted from Scott Thiel’s “Hong Kong: Mobile Apps Under Close Watch of the Hong Kong Privacy Commissioner,” *Lexology*, June 8, 2016.

52 “The Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance,” PCPD, https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/data_privacy_law/ordinance_at_a_Glance/ordinance.html.

53 Jessica Litman, “Information Privacy/Information Property,” *Stanford Law Review* 52 (2000): 1295, 1299.

54 *Ibid.*, 1303.

55 Torin Monahan, *Surveillance in the Time of Insecurity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 29.

3 Surveillance Management: Big Data-Analytics and *Che Vuoi—What Do You Want From Me?*

In *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), James Burnham predicted the inevitable arrival of managerial elites. The rule of the managerial oligarchy consists of well-educated professionals in different sectors, including government officials, corporate executives, scientists, and social engineers. In “The Prospects for Cyberocracy (Revisited),” David Ronfeldt and Danielle Varda argue that an “information revolution” will improve the “efficiency and cost-effectiveness of many activities,” and new “technologies may profoundly alter the nature of political power, sovereignty, and governance.”⁵⁶ Currently many government databases (healthcare, educational, political, social security, financial) designed by various technocrats as well as the accompanying infrastructure are not well integrated in Hong Kong. Once a “full-fledged cyberocracy” is in place, Ronfeldt and Varda predict that “cybercrats” will solve many administrative and social problems, have full command over people, and have the capacity to “redraw the boundaries of appropriate, authorized behavior.”⁵⁷ In addition to what Louis Althusser calls the “ideological state apparatus” (propaganda, education, art, entertainment) and the “repressive state apparatus” (police, army),⁵⁸ there will be new AI-policing apparatuses, or AI-assisted neural and perceptual information processing to reinforce “networked governance,” or government by AI.⁵⁹ The benefits of a multipronged management approach are envisioned by Google Chief Economist Hal Varian in no unequivocal terms: “data extraction and analysis, better monitoring, personalization and customization, and continuous experiments.”⁶⁰

Surveillance management implies that people should surrender their entire being to AI and data analytics (in the style of psychoanalysis) so that the higher powers can examine, profile, and improve on them. Economic surveillance is important because Hong Kong is a financial center as well as one of the largest centers in Asia for money laundering and terrorist financing. E-banking is common as people frequently download mobile banking apps, including Bank of China, Hang Seng Bank, HSBC, DBS, and virtual banks such as ZA Bank, WeLab Bank, Mox Bank. To battle money laundering and terrorist financing,

56 David Ronfeldt and Danielle Varda. “The Prospects for Cyberocracy (Revisited),” *Working Papers*, Paper 29, 2008, http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/pn_wp/29.

57 Ibid.

58 Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1977), 145, 158.

59 Ronfeldt and Varda, “The Prospects for Cyberocracy (Revisited).”

60 Zuboff, “Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization,” *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no.1 (2015): 75.

biometrics adoption is a “steady” process, with “Daon and Tradelink partnering to deploy fingerprint and facial recognition authentication for customers for Dah Sing Bank.”⁶¹ In recent years, Hong Kong has actively promoted digital wallets, with Alipay, WeChat Pay, Tap & Go, PayMe, BoC Pay, and Octopus attracting millions of registered users. The result is that a smartphone is a tell-all device that can track a person’s financial situation, payment records, spending habits, and debts.

Many predict that Hong Kong may follow China and become another cashless society, but the preference for digital wallets instead of fiat money is not without drawbacks. For example, when Stephen McDonnell—a BBC journalist—was in Beijing, he was once “suspected of spreading malicious rumors,” and his WeChat account was temporarily blocked in 2019. He suddenly recognized that he could not function in China without WeChat (or *Weixin* 微信). In an article entitled “China Social Media: WeChat and the Surveillance State,” he argues that this super-app provides school or social arrangement details, gives news updates, enables payment “for absolutely everything from a bowl of noodles to clothes to a dining room table.” It is x, “Facebook, Google Maps, Tinder and Apple Pay all rolled into one.” While he acknowledges that surveillance and self-censorship are a small price to pay for having a normal life in China, the “censors who can lock you out of WeChat hold real power over you.”⁶²

In Hong Kong, political surveillance may create paranoia as the government uses legal means and surveillance technologies to monitor the population after a series of protests in the 2000s. The Hong Kong Police Force, Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department all have their own CCTV camera networks. In 2024, the government further announced plans to purchase and install an additional 2,000 CCTV cameras for territory-wide crime deterrence and security enhancement. The Commissioner of Police Raymond Siu provided benchmarked data to justify these surveillance cameras which may come with facial recognition technology, noting that “the number of CCTV cameras stood at 7.3 million and 90,000” in the UK and Singapore respectively, while the number of CCTV cameras deployed per kilometer is 128.6 in Singapore, 30.4 in the UK, and only 1.8 in Hong Kong.⁶³

61 Stephen Mayhew, “Facial Recognition System Deployed at Hong Kong-Shenzhen Border,” *Biometric Update*, July 25, 2018.

62 McDonnell, “China Social Media: WeChat and the Surveillance State,” *BBC News*, June 7, 2019.

63 Ho, “2,000 New CCTV Cameras ‘Not Enough,’” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Feb 14, 2024.

In light of the implementation of the National Security Law, big tech firms also feel increasing political paranoia due to the increase of government data requests. ByteDance suspended the social media app TikTok in Hong Kong indefinitely citing concerns for users' privacy while "attempting to distance itself from allegations of assisting the PRC in surveilling Hong Kong demonstrators during the 2019–2020 protests."⁶⁴ Google, X, Meta, Zoom, Microsoft, and Telegram are likewise "placed in a dilemma" because they prioritize the laws of Hong Kong on the one hand and user privacy on the other. For a while, they relied on the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) the US has with Hong Kong. This bilateral treaty honors different legal frameworks in different countries, and American tech firms can direct requests for user data from the government to the US Department of Justice for deliberation, and only release data "if the request meets the criteria of the MLAT."⁶⁵ As the treaty has been suspended since 2020, tech firms must turn to their in-house global policy to act as they deem fit. In 2020, Google received 43 requests and responded positively in 3 cases. Apple is fairly cooperative: "In the second half of 2022, Apple received 272 requests and disclosed data for 181 of them." Meta does not disclose data but responds actively on matters relating to content restriction and removal requests, and "the number of complied with restriction requests from the Hong Kong government increased from 199 in the first half of 2020 to 4,004 in the first half of 2023."⁶⁶

On a different note, workplace surveillance is common in Hong Kong and is not limited to CCTV or door access systems. For example, Microsoft developed a feature called "Productivity Score" that allows IT administrators to monitor staff "communications, meetings, content collaboration, teamwork and mobility measures" in the workplace, pulling user data from "Exchange, SharePoint, OneDrive, Teams, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Yammer, and Skype." The original design can show usernames, but this feature was removed by Microsoft in response to privacy concerns as users worried that organizations would use this score "to snoop on employees."⁶⁷ In 2020, the accounting giant PwC installed facial recognition software to monitor home workers in

64 Tin Pak, "Internet Censorship and Digital Surveillance Under Hong Kong's National Security Law," *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, March 28, 2024, <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/internet-censorship-and-digital-surveillance-under-hong-kongs-national-security-law/13/34>.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Kurt Mackie, "Microsoft Removes Potential Snooping Capability from Productivity Score," *Redmond Magazine*, December 1, 2020, <https://redmondmag.com/articles/2020/12/01/microsoft-productivity-score-snooping.aspx>.

Hong Kong and their remote working hours. While some believed that this could be a violation of privacy, the firm disagreed. In the “PwC Hong Kong Transparency Report,” the firm specifically states that their “monitoring program is based on a consistent network-wide inspections program based on professional standards relating to quality control” as well as “network policies, procedures, tools, and guidance.”⁶⁸

Data analysts need no confessions because biometric surveillance allows data controllers to know their users better than anyone else, revealing hidden truth such as health, mental condition, and affect. Apart from facial recognition, many companies use screen monitoring systems to watch their staff’s screens and online behaviors. Some require staff to don biometric wearables to replace traditional passkeys for doors, computer passwords, or e-signatures. Many companies also use biometric attendance systems (such as fingerprint-based lock systems) to identify who tends to arrive late and leave early or take breaks too frequently. As expected, big data often reveals red flags and symptoms, and the analysand (or data subject) is shocked by the omniscience of the (bio)data analysts. In 2020, the PCPD revised the guidelines on the collection and use of biometric data, emphasizing the importance of privacy, proportionality, and explainability, noting that any “wrongful disclosure of biometric data” can lead to “unintended/unauthorized re-identification of individuals, impersonations,” or “discrimination.”⁶⁹

In a surveillance society, the data subject is doubly alienated and can become neurotic. First, *data alienation* refers to the phenomenon whereby humans are reduced to delivering data to a system or a device that is not subject to their full control. The databank can be accessed by many (un)known parties, and the data can be freely read and interpreted by many more, impacting, among other things, promotion opportunities or personal reputation. Second, *symptomatic alienation* refers to the fact that in the face of big data, users often feel estranged by data analytics. Data reveals their (behavioral or biological) symptoms, and workers may feel vulnerable to the point of feeling perpetual shame, guilt, or embarrassment. “Did I visit this website?” “Was I late so many times this month?” “How come I didn’t smile more?” “Is it true that my heart beats so fast?” Workers’ neurotic state is best captured by the expression “*Che vuoi—What? What do you want from me?*” “The subject does not know why he

68 “PwC Hong Kong Transparency Report,” PwC, October 30, 2020, <https://www.pwchk.com/en/about-us/transparency-report-2020.pdf>.

69 See “Guidance on Collection and Use of Biometric Data,” PCPD, August 2020, https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/resources_centre/publications.files/GN_biometric_e.pdf.

is occupying this place in the symbolic network ... ‘*Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying I am?*’”⁷⁰

4 Digital Doubles and Trauma

Micromanagement and microsurveillance are made easy thanks to modern technology, but as David Lyon points out, such systematic “[s]urveillance ... also exhibits both hard and soft faces.”⁷¹ The soft face is deemed by many to be not only desirable but also necessary. Most people accept the documentation and digitization of personal details, medical history, and travel history by government authorities. However, the hard (predatory) face of microsurveillance can make people feel very uncomfortable as people lose their right to be invisible. For the first time in human history, humans are forced to have digital doubles. Their physical self may be free, but their digital self is captured and held hostage by various databases and data controllers. Like all hostage survivors, people experience fear and distress, knowing that if all their digital self goes viral, they are doomed to be shattered by trauma and pain.

In the digital era, our virtual double can be our worst enemy, easily weaponized by others to use against us. All devices now have built-in webcams that can record our every move. Due to COVID-19, the remote working environment popularized tools such as Zoom and Google Meet in 2020. People learn to become digital performers when computers record attendance rates, participants’ input, chat records, and attendee attention tracking. However, some also uploaded photos that showed participants’ inappropriate behaviors.

Outdoor surveillance cameras pose a different set of problems because many places have installed security cameras or spycams. Local transport relies mostly on dashcam surveillance to increase accountability and process insurance claims when accidents occur. In the case of taxis, surveillance became a burning issue when a photo of a breastfeeding mother was uploaded in 2016. This led to an even greater controversy in 2019, when footage of a married singer—Andy Hui—went viral when he was found cheating on his wife, Sammi Cheng, another famous singer, as he kissed fellow actress Jacqueline Wong repeatedly in the backseat of a taxi.

Indoor surveillance is common because many people spend long hours at work and use security cameras to monitor their home environment, pets,

⁷⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 113.

⁷¹ David Lyon, “Everyday Surveillance: Personal Data and Social Classifications,” *Information, Communication & Society* 5, no. 2 (2002): 243.

elderly parents, or young children. In 2004, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data issued a guideline on monitoring domestic helpers, and another guideline on CCTV surveillance and drones in 2010. The message is vague: domestic helpers should be notified of overt monitoring mechanisms, yet covert monitoring can be justified if there “is a reasonable suspicion that a child or an elderly person has suffered (or is likely to suffer) from abuse or neglect,” “it is highly likely that the suspected abuse occurs at home,” and there are “no alternatives to obtaining evidence” apart from covert monitoring.⁷² The bottomline is that surveillance cameras should not be placed in places such as bathrooms or bedrooms, and data recordings should be deleted as soon as practicable once the purpose is fulfilled.

In 2017, the Consumer Council of Hong Kong stressed the need to balance security concerns and the right to privacy for family members, domestic helpers, visitors, friends, and personnel providing door-to-door services, noting that video and voice recordings are often stored on third-party servers. While people pay a fee to maximize cloud storage, home surveillance cameras may be vulnerable to being hacked if they are connected to a non-local “server situated in a region or a country where privacy protection is inadequate.”⁷³ As of 2021, the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) is the primary legislation dealing with data privacy, noting that “data users should carry out a privacy impact assessment before using CCTV.” However, these guidelines have “no legal force of their own.”⁷⁴

Daniel Bell (1919–2011) once observed that technology can show democratic or authoritarian tendencies since “the new revolution” makes possible both an “intense degree of centralization of power” and “decentralization because of the multiplicity, diversity, and cheapness of the modes of communication.”⁷⁵ In a cyber society, the sad truth is that the doubling of self signifies a cycle of “dispossession” (Zuboff’s word). The first stage of such dispossession is initiated by a unilateral incursion into every citizen’s undefended space such as “your laptop, your phone, a webpage, the street where you live, an email to your friend, your walk in the park, browsing online for a birthday gift, sharing photos of your kids, your interests and tastes, your digestion, your tears, your

72 “Monitoring and Personal Data Privacy at Work: Points to Note for Employers of Domestic Helpers,” PCPD, 2004, https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/publications/files/DH_e.pdf.

73 “Choose Surveillance Cameras with Caution to Prevent Privacy Breach Reset Default Password to Avoid Being Hacked,” Consumer Council, March 15, 2017, https://www.consumer.org.hk/ws_en/news/press/485/home-surveillance-cameras.html.

74 Ben Choi, “CCTV and Privacy Rights,” Hong Kong Lawyer, December 2019, <http://www.hk-lawyer.org/content/cctv-and-privacy-rights>.

75 Daniel Bell, “Thinking Ahead,” *Harvard Business Review* 57, no. 3 (May–June 1979): 36.

attention, your feelings, your face.” The second stage is habituation. People see that surveillance is “inevitable. New dependencies develop. As populations grow numb, it becomes more difficult for individuals and groups to complain.” The third stage is adaptation. There is supposed to be a limit to what government can know, but private corporations increasingly adapt to the “demands of government authorities, court rulings, and public opinion.” The fourth stage is redirection. All institutions “cultivate new rhetoric, methods, and design elements” so that “they appear to be compliant with social and legal demands” for surveillance. There is no resistance because people are conditioned to accept the process, but they know they can be badly burnt if things go wrong.⁷⁶

5 **Sousveillance Capitalism: Marketing the Self in the Age of Voyeurism and Exhibitionism**

Sousveillance is a complementary, decentralized tactic designed to counter the monopoly of institutional, hierarchical surveillance. In the words of Steve Mann and collaborators,

One way to challenge and problematize both surveillance and acquiescence to it is to resituate these technologies of control on individuals, offering panoptic technologies to help them observe those in authority. We call this inverse panopticon “*sousveillance*.”⁷⁷

Sousveillance heightens the culture of alternative (lateral, or bottom-up) voyeurism and can supplement the monologic top-down approach. The examples provided by Mann and collaborators include “customers photographing shopkeepers; taxi passengers photographing cab drivers; citizens photographing police officers who come to the doors; civilians photographing government officials.”⁷⁸ Sousveillance narratives can have multiple sources, multiple creators and multiple perspectives involving different recording equipment and time stamps. The final product can also be an assemblage of different (rhizomatic) footage. Sousveillance is democratic, and can rouse public attention and achieve checks and balances of power due to the unique viewpoints and voice embedded in the narratives.

⁷⁶ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Kindle.

⁷⁷ Mann et al., “Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices,” 332.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 334.

Sousveillance capitalism liberalizes alternative viewing angles and perspectives. GoPro and drones are typical do-it-yourself products that allow users to capture their own environment and actions in radical ways. In June 2022, the Hong Kong introduced Drone Laws—Small Unmanned Aircraft Order (Cap. 448G)—and classified drones in different categories. Any drone that weighs over 250g must be registered, labeled, and operated by a registered remote pilot. Operation hours should be daytime only, and the Civil Aviation Department's guideline suggests that drones should steer clear of restricted flying zones and stay away from people who are not “involved in the flight,” and “vehicles, vessels, or structures” that are not “under the control of remote pilot during the flight.”⁷⁹ In addition, encryption is recommended during the process of data transmission, and there should be an access control policy in case the drone is lost and falls into wrong hands. However, in November of the same year, a 26 year-old man was arrested for committing voyeurism because he used a drone to film people having sex in hotels. The drone was found to have recorded and stored more than twenty indecent videos before it hit a building and crashed on Supreme Court Road in Admiralty.

On the other hand, plenty of web applications target self-sousveillance and mutual sousveillance. For example, the modern obsession with weight loss not only increases gym attendance but also directs users to download weight-watching apps, which invite users to add friends to monitor each other's progress. The ads motivate users to purchase certain supplements and share their journey of weight loss and bodybuilding online, leading to participatory sousveillance, social validation, and monetization. The cycle of sousveillance capitalism is complete when the weight-watcher is so successful that users are invited to market certain health products.

However, nothing surpasses the economy of selfie exhibitionism. Taking selfies can be a self-pastoring attempt to practice self-care and boost confidence. However, the result is highly addictive because at the click of a few buttons, users can create a digital double and transform an eighty-year old Chinese male into a young, Caucasian Lolita, or even Brolita. Selfies idolize the love of self-gaze and intersubjective looking. In 2014, Google reported that people took 93 million selfies per day on Android models alone.⁸⁰ The love of selfies boost a strong selfie economy that includes high-end cameras and smartphones,

79 “General Safety Guidelines for Flying sUA,” Civil Aviation Department, CAD, May 31, 2024. https://www.cod.gov.hk/english/sua_safetyreg_safetyguidelines.html.

80 Richard Brandt, “Google Divulges Numbers at I/O: 20 Billion Texts, 93 million Selfies and More,” *Silicon Valley Business Journal*, June 25, 2014, <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2014/06/25/google-divulges-numbers-at-i-o-20-billion-texts-93.html>.

selfie sticks, selfie lights, tripods, photo-retouch apps, make-up products, cosmetic surgeries, tourism, and attractive selfie spots. One study found that the “global selfie stick market reached a value of US\$610 million in 2022.”⁸¹ Selfies are emancipating and self-empowering in the sense that sousveillance can be fun, and the resulting images combine the real self and the hyperreal self to curate new identities and transgress racial, gender, age, or biological boundaries.

Sharing selfies online heightens the process of celebrification as well as the problem of self-esteem. In the age of selfism, people build a channel to showcase themselves and “to be looked-at-ness,” to be “liked,” and to look young and perfect suddenly become important. In the words of Žižek, “I exist only insofar as I am looked at” or I am looking at others all the time.⁸² Selfies also become increasingly linked to the discourse of monetization and pathology, and the loss of “selfie control” can lead to poor self-esteem, body dysmorphia, and depression. Bad selfies can lead to selfie or Snapchat dysmorphia, driving people to plastic surgery in order to measure up to the airbrushed photos on magazine covers.⁸³ When people habitually upload their selfies on social media, these “frequently trigger perceptions of self-indulgence or attention-seeking social dependence that raises the damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don’t specter of either narcissism or very low self-esteem.”⁸⁴ In addition, scammers can turn to “selfie spoofing” (including deep fakes) to utilize a target’s photo, open fraudulent accounts, or carry out identity theft.

The selfie economy shows no sign of waning because of the fun of celebrification, which allows ordinary people to have their five-minute fame. Once selfies go viral, money follows when the subject is often the “product and the producer of labor.”⁸⁵ The rise of influencer marketing typifies the success of celebrification and sousveillance capitalism because people actively give up

81 “Selfie Stick Market: Global Industry Trends, Share, Size, Growth, Opportunity and Forecast 2021–2026,” IMARC Group, 2019, <https://www.imarcgroup.com/selfie-stick-market>.

82 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the Misuse of a Nation* (London: Verso, 2001), 249.

83 James Purtill, “Snapchat dysmorphia: Selfie Filters May be Driving Young People to Plastic Surgery, Study Shows,” *ABC News*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/snapchat-dysmorphia-from-selfie-filters-driving-cosmetic-surgery/12051184>.

84 Christie Barakat, “Science Links Selfies to Narcissism, Addiction, and Low Self Esteem,” *Adweek*, April 16, 2014, www.adweek.com/socialtimes/selfies-narcissism-addiction-low-self-esteem/147769.

85 Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2013), 92.

their privacy in order to gain social validation and brand endorsement. Influencers combine the roles of host, model, writer, advertiser, director, and videographer of their sousveillance stories. Marketers are happy to work with influencers because of their large fan base, and audience reception shows that the content can be more engaging and “authentic” than the official sales pitch. Instead of doing all the hard work, capitalists and marketers only need to monitor the number of followers to select the right person to sell their products to. The operational cost is also comparatively low.

There are pros and cons to being an influencer. Influencers draw brand attention because top Instagram influencers—usually actors and or celebrities in Hong Kong—have over 1 million followers, yet the engagement rate can be on the low side, at between 1–3.5%. Star influencers can have a loyal fan base with over 200,000 followers.⁸⁶ The No.1 YouTuber in Hong Kong is Emi Wong 王樂婷 (b.1992)—a university graduate and fitness coach, and her channel has 6.26 million subscribers in 2023. Stephen Shiu Yeuk-yuen 蕭若元 (b.1949)—a media personality and news presenter—operates a memehongkong channel, and has 882,000 subscribers; some estimate that his monthly earnings may reach more than HK\$140,000 (US\$17,950). Many influencers live a short online life, sharing the fate of what Chris Rojek calls “celetoids,” or a kind of “compressed, concentrated, attributed celebrity” that is quickly followed by anonymity.⁸⁷

Sousveillance can lead to mixed results because the love of voyeurism and exhibitionistic sharing can be motivated by altruism (such as digital vigilantism) but also by more reprehensible motives (such as selfishness, jealousy or nosiness). Privacy is important, but to some people, it is even more important to create content the audience wants to see. Since posing for a money shot can get more views and likes, many are eager to try, and accidents can happen. Bansal et al. estimate that from “October 2011 to November 2017,” there have been “259 deaths while clicking selfies in 137 incidents” worldwide. The “mean age was 22.94,” and about 72.5% of these deaths were males, 27.5 were females.⁸⁸ Sophia Cheung, a 32-year-old model, was technically a micro-influencer, with 43,300 followers in 2021. She was known for risky, dare-devil photos, and her

86 Macro-influencers have about 50,000 to 200,000 followers, micro-influencers usually have between 10,000 to 50,000 followers, and nano-influencers have about 1,000 to 10,000 followers. See “Social Media Influencer Marketing in Hong Kong,” AnyMind Group, August 27, 2020, <https://anymindgroup.com/news/blog/7686>.

87 Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2010), 20.

88 Agam Bansal et al., “Selfies: A Boon or Bane?” *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 7, no. 4 (2018): 828.

death in July 2021 was caused by her falling 16 feet off a cliff when she attempted a photo opportunity.⁸⁹

There are also people who track and spy on others when “[i]nterpersonal surveillance and control practices have become especially ubiquitous thanks to the hegemony and democratization of mobile communication and hyper-connectivity.”⁹⁰ Given the huge demand for online news, news outlets often have “exposé hotlines” that reward user-generated content, combining media-led surveillance and sousveillance. Whereas news content used to be made, published, and distributed by professionals, today any individual can be a content creator and distributor of news on social platforms. Suzanne Fengler et al. note that it remains to be seen “whether the accountability instruments emerging online like newsroom blogs, online ombudsmen and media criticism on the social web—successfully support or even replace ... traditional instruments of self-regulation.”⁹¹ In Hong Kong, homemade videos often go viral and are later shared by mainstream media, and many sousveillance narratives serve the function of altruistic digital vigilantism. A video about a rude bus driver can be first uploaded on Facebook and later become a newspaper item online. Newspapers can still enjoy ad revenues, but this crowdsourcing of news means lower manpower and production cost. At the same time, the scope of surveillance is wider because everyone can report on others.

Sousveillance can also be linked to the rise of relationship monitoring apps due to parental tyranny, spousal insecurity, or curiosity. People spy on their children, their (former) partner, or celebrities. If sousveillance is covert and unsolicited, it often leads to intense conflicts, power struggles, or relationship rupture. Stalkerware often involves payment for service as it enables the interested party to monitor the target’s SMS records, calls, camera, microphone, GPS position, messaging apps, and web browsing. Kaspersky, a cyber-security company, observes that “the number of people who have discovered such software on their devices has risen by at least 35%” in 2020.⁹²

89 Vivian Okpirikhre, “Daredevil Influencer Dies After Falling Off Waterfall While Taking Selfie,” *YabaLeftOnline*, July 14, 2021, <https://www.yabaleftonline.ng/daredevil-influencer-dies-falling-waterfall-while-taking-selfie>.

90 Mark Andrejevic, “The Work of Watching One Another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance,” *Surveillance & Society* 2, no. 4 (2005): 479.

91 Suzanne Fengler et al., “How Effective is Media Self-Regulation? Results from a Comparative Survey of European Journalists,” *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 3 (2015): 250.

92 Joe Tidy, “Stalkerware: the Software that Spies On Your Partner,” *BBC News*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50166147>.

In romantic relationships, mobile phones provide a common type of “lateral” surveillance among young couples. In a 2018 survey conducted in the US, 1,663 subjects aged 18–35 gave their views on phone snooping. Fully 68% of men and 52% of women confessed that they were phone snoopers, and 38% of men spied on their partners without permission. The problem is that when lovers feel that their privacy is being violated by the beloved, they can develop mistrust of the partner as well as fear of technology—a common “psychological response to such a trauma.”⁹³ The survey also shows that 17% (or one in six women) would break up with their partner for snooping, while 25% of men would break up with a snooper.⁹⁴ Second, most people spy on their partners to look for signs of cheating, but if a partnered person is found to be unfaithful or tracking a former love interest, this can lead to spousal conflicts, quarrels, or breakups. In 2020, Grace Chow 周楊青 (b.1988), an influencer from Beijing, ended her nine-year relationship with Show Lo 羅志祥 (b.1979), a Taiwanese pop star, then checked his smartphone and discovered his long-standing multiple affairs. This led to a heated debate in Hong Kong on whether or not a person should monitor their partners’ device. Some argued that “ignorance is bliss” and declined to undertake any sousveillance measures. Others said that sousveillance should be consented to and that it is a red flag if the partner simply refuses to let his or her phone be examined. One respondent even justified the checking of the partner’s multiple devices, bank statements, and Octopus card.

Fan sousveillance presents a unique situation because of the symbiotic dynamics between stardom, fandom, and consumer capitalism. The love of idols is arguably a form of emotional consumption. Stars perform on stage, and fans become fanatic consumers. Fans and fan clubs are necessary for the making of a megastar. With great love as well as organizational and purchasing power, fans support their idols, follow them, attend all idol-related events, and purchase various products and merchandise. However, if it goes too far, fan sousveillance can result in harassment. Duckie Choy is a fan of Korean pop idols, but her devotional love bordered on severe violation of people’s privacy. She stalked her heartthrob and followed pop celebrity Hwang Min-hyun (b.1995) to Japan and showed off the results on social media. She went to the dorms of several Korean celebrities who starred in a show entitled *Produce 101*. She opened and checked their luggage, commented on their belongings, and

93 Tidy, “Stalkerware: the Software that Spies On Your Partner.”

94 Ash Turner, “How Millennial’s Spy on Their Partner’s Phone: the Phone Snooping Survey,” BankMyCell, October 2018, <https://www.bankmycell.com/blog/snooping-on-your-phone#info-1>.

uploaded photos online. In 2018, she commodified the flight details of K-pop group Wanna One (disbanded in the same year).⁹⁵ If “old school” paparazzi “prefer stealth,” the new generation can aggressively stalk their targets, photograph celebrities, and make money from their efforts, leading to escalated conflicts between celebrities and fans and between fans who are more romantic and fans who are more pragmatic.⁹⁶ In the era of sousveillance capitalism, fans may want to have the front row seats and also sell them, noting that “everybody buys from everybody else.”⁹⁷

6 Showveillance Capitalism

Showveillance questions the authenticity of surveillance because surveillance can be a “reality show.” Strange as may it seem, CCTV cameras can be dummies purchased by those who do not want to invest in expensive security systems. Fake cameras offer a cheap way to deter criminals given that few can tell the difference from a distance. Second, even if the CCTV cameras are fully functioning, the footage can be problematic because of poor image quality, or the CCTV cameras can have blind spots. To question the authority of surveillance technology, a 2019 BBC drama *The Capture* played on the fact that London is a surveillance city but some surveillance is nothing but showveillance. The message is that digital surveillance footage and information about people can be problematic, particularly with today’s upsurge of deepfake videos.⁹⁸ With this technology, the face of a person can be digitally removed and edited. Video engineers can create false footage that looks exactly like reality, creating a “you” that is more you than you. As noted by Julia Angwin, first you are watched, then you “can be impersonated,” or incriminated, or become trapped in a “hall of mirrors.”⁹⁹

Showveillance TV is controversial because it mixes participatory surveillance, voyeurism and exhibitionism to increase profits or to perfect what Lyons

95 “Here are 4 of K-Pop’s Most Infamous Sasaeng Fans,” *Koreaboo*, <https://www.koreaboo.com/lists/4-kpops-infamous-sasaeng-fans>.

96 Ray Murray, “Stalking the Paparazzi: A View From a Different Angle,” *Visual Communication Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2011): 4.

97 Tony Sonenshine, “Is Everybody a Journalist?” *American Journalism Review*, October 1997, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100613080606/http://ajr.org/Article.asp?id=2325>.

98 John Jewell, “The Capture Raises the Very Real Spectre of Deepfake Video,” *Wales Online*, October 11, 2019, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/news-opinion/capture-raises-very-real-spectre-17066895>.

99 Angwin, *Dragnet Nation*, 20.

calls “panoptic-commodity.” The basic concept of *Love Island* is to market the exhibitionistic self and sell the seduction of voyeuristic panopticism. In Hong Kong, showveillance TV can be backed by product promotion and marketing campaigns. In 2012, a popular primetime reality show, *Bride Wannabes* (《盛女愛作戰》), follows the life of five “leftover women” (盛女) in their thirties and directly reinforces the necessity of the beauty culture and beauty capitalism. The show has an “average of 26 rating points,” which means that “1.7 million viewers, or 24 percent of Hong Kong’s population, were watching it every evening.”¹⁰⁰ However, the point of the show is to accompany and observe these ladies’ every move and make them become marriageable. As a result, the world observes the display of their “natural self” first, then various professionals are summoned to provide “expert” advice to level up their beauty. Santino, a self-proclaimed relationship coach, offers the questionable advice that women can be more attractive if they face men at a “45 degree angle.” The show emphasizes the importance of self-surveillance, peer sousveillance, and consumerism in order to measure up to the standard defined by patriarchy and the beauty culture. The first five shows notably featured 23 brands, including beauty salons, restaurants, and dating agencies. The show invited substantial criticism because it scrutinized women only to market products by emphasizing ageism and body shaming in the name of self-improvement.

7 Anti-Surveillance Capitalism or the Privacy Paradox

John Bacon-Shone argues that young as well as highly educated people are aware of privacy issues. However, there is a discrepancy between thought and action, which Bacon-Shone calls a “privacy tradeoff.”¹⁰¹ In his 2014 study, all participants said they would not switch to an anonymous Octopus card instead of a personalized card because of benefits such as student concessionary fares, “price discounts, convenience, or connection with other services.” If their personal data were to be misused, some would report the case to the police, but the “majority of the participants reported that they would do nothing because it was hard to find out who sold the personal data.”¹⁰²

100 Hong Liang, “Bride Wannabes’ an Insult to Women,” *China Daily*, May 4, 2012.

101 Bacon-Shone, “Baseline Survey of Public Attitudes on Privacy and Data Protection. 2014 Main Report” (PCPD Resources Center, 2014), 61, https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/resources_centre/publications/surveys/files/baselinesurvey2014.pdf.

102 Ibid., 59, 58.

After the 2019–2020 Hong Kong protests, the tech-savvy generation now leans toward a hypervigilant, risk-based approach and welcomes data encryption, protection of one's traffic (phone calls, emails etc.), ad blocking, engaging in data diversification such as not giving real names, and using different online personas. The need to watch who is watching us leads to a new kind of anti-surveillance capitalism. Some choose to buy web camera covers. Many purchase anti-spyware, VPNs, or internet security software, and the market is robust. There are good reasons to be on the safe side because according to Microsoft's 2019 *Security Endpoint Threat Report*, Hong Kong had "the third highest drive-by download attack volume" in the Asian region and "registered the 11th highest malware encounter rate at 2.28 percent." In terms of the ransomware encounter rate, it was "9th highest across the region at 0.02 percent."¹⁰³

The digital age provides comfort and convenience, but it is important to emphasize what Lina Dencik et al. call "data justice," which can be related to broader social justice.¹⁰⁴ In 1967, Alan Westin (1929–2013), an educator and privacy advocate, argued that people should have the right to "control, edit, manage, and delete information about them and decide when, how, and to what extent information is communicated to others."¹⁰⁵ However, the government is aware that relentless data surveillance can ensure national security. Capitalists invent, use, and exploit clients' data for product improvement or sales. In turn, excessive surveillance may work against the idea of freedom, "leading to repression, self-censorship and chilling-effects in the organization, mobilization, and pursuit of social justice."¹⁰⁶

I argue that the love of data justice requires a more nuanced, personalized, customizable approach rather than a blanket policy designed to either enable

103 Rita Ngai, "Hong Kong Recorded All-Time Low Malware and Ransomware Encounters: Microsoft Security Endpoint Threat Report 2019," Microsoft, June 17, 2020, <https://news.microsoft.com/en-hk/2020/06/17/hong-kong-recorded-all-time-low-malware-and-ransomware-encounters-microsoft-security-endpoint-threat-report-2019>.

104 Lina Dencik et al., "Towards Data Justice: Bridging Anti-Surveillance and Social Justice Activism," in *Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights*, eds. Didier Bigo, Engin Isin, and Evelyn Ruppert (New York: Routledge, 2019), 167–186.

105 Westin believed that privacy should be treated as a property right: "[P]ersonal information ... should be defined as a property right, with all the restraints on interference by public or private authorities and due-process guarantees that our law of property has been so skillful in devising. Along with this concept should go the idea that circulation of personal information by someone other than the owner or his trusted agent is handling a dangerous commodity in interstate commerce and creates special duties and liabilities on the information utility or government system handling it." See Alan Westin, *Privacy and Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 324.

106 Dencik et al., "Towards Data Justice," 180.

or block surveillance. Given the nature of networked technology, people's right to have control over their data is even more important because data leak can mean the loss of reputation, career, even the loss of a life. I argue that it is advisable that people should be given *specific* rather than vague information, *changeable* rather than irreversible consent, and *customizable* rather than a "tick one box" approach in data collection, data use, and data sharing. It is also wise to recommend a rights-based approach. User rights should include not only conventional categories such as "the right to consent" ("I agree"), "the right to data protection," "the right to data access and rectification," or "the right to be forgotten."¹⁰⁷ While it is important to let users have the right to change their mind, it is even more important to have the right to knowledge, and people should know who tracked, shared, or used their data. It is important to honor what Fuchs calls "labor autonomy" and to respect digital labor.¹⁰⁸ As noted by Sara Bannerman, all these measures will "require much more than the blanket notice-and-consent model and default privacy settings that, for example, have permitted massive access to Facebook personal data by app developers."¹⁰⁹

A common saying on the internet is that "if the product is free, YOU are the product."¹¹⁰ Capitalism emphasizes the power of money. In this spirit, those who wish to keep their privacy should at least have the right to buy their privacy at a reasonable fee, or enjoy the "existence of real choices, enabled by regulation that permits personal data access and deletion, control over privacy settings, data portability requirements, and effective competition regulation."¹¹¹ Those who believe they "have nothing to hide and believe that all the information is already out in the public domain" should have the freedom to do so.

Žižek observes that cyberspace—the space for free networking, free speech, and free apps—can in fact be the most managed, totalitarian space. Cyberspace does not offer "emancipatory potential [but r]ather a 'totalitarian threat.'"¹¹²

107 Deandre Harriott, "How the Privacy Paradox Affects Business Growth," Digital Marketing Institute, April 26, 2021, <https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/how-the-privacy-paradox-affects-business-growth>.

108 Christian Fuchs, "The Political Economy of Privacy on Facebook," *Television & New Media* 13, no. 2 (2012): 143.

109 Sara Bannerman, "Relational Privacy and the Networked Governance of the Self," *Information, Communication & Society* 22, no. 14 (2018): 2191.

110 "Instagram's Privacy Policy and How to Make Sure Your Account Stays as Private As Possible," Tech Wellness, August 4, 2021, <https://techwellness.com/blogs/expertise/instagram-privacy-policy>.

111 Bannerman, "Relational Privacy," 2192.

112 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* 256.

On the surface, a person can have multiple devices, adopt multiple personas and avatars, and explore “a wealth of shifting identities” to question “the ideological mechanism of production of Self, the immanent violence and arbitrariness of this production/construction.”¹¹³ However, big techs as well as the government can watch everybody while the watchers are unwatched and unmonitored. As Gianni Vattimo (1936–2023) argues, when “the self-transparent society becomes possible from a purely technical point of view, this self-transparency is shown to be an ideal of domination and not emancipation.”¹¹⁴ With little control over our privacy, we are held as data hostages and sold like data slaves. Hypervigilance is important, even though knowledge is not power in this case.

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113 Ibid., 202.

114 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 23.

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Mass Transit Rail, Mass Transit Discourse: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of MTR Posters

Jennifer Eagleton

1 Introduction

Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR) carries an average of 4.29 million passengers on its rail system each day (as of December 2021).¹ It is an ideal space for its stations to serve as gallery space, display information from government departments, public service announcements, and other messages in the form of posters. This chapter looks at several poster advertisements displayed in four MTR stations and analyses them using a multimodal critical discourse analysis framework. This study shows how texts and images in these posters may hint or evoke power relations. By looking at these posters on a particular day, month, or year, we can obtain a temporal snapshot of Hong Kong society. Given how these depictions are made within wider linguistic, societal, and cultural contexts, the posters will be further discussed in terms of how the city is framed and presented by the government and other semi-public enterprises.

All texts are snapshots of the time of their construction and linked to the wider social-cultural context of the past. For example, the aim of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration was the continuance of its systems in order to maintain confidence in its stability and prosperity after Britain's departure:

There were 12 large areas – basic policies – which will never change. And the whole idea was what we call a snapshot, a 1984 snapshot. Take out your Kodak camera; take a picture of Hong Kong in 1984 and you can say that is what will not change for at least 50 years.²

1 "Hong Kong: The Facts—Transport," The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, May 2023, <https://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/factsheets/docs/transport.pdf>.

2 Alan Hoo, Chair of the Basic Law Institute and Member of the CPPCC National Committee, gave a speech to the Hong Kong Democratic Foundation lunch on April 10, 2008. See Alan Hoo, "The Roadmap towards Universal Suffrage in Hong Kong," May 1, 2008. I personally attended this speech. The full speech can be accessed at: <http://www.hkdf.org/the-roadmap-towards-universal-suffrage-in-hong-kong/>.

It therefore seems reasonable to assume that posters in this major transport hub will reflect the concerns of the entities that created them. Because of their high degree of visual impact and placement, posters could be considered as the oldest and, in a sense, the purest form of “advertising,”³ for a “poster aims to draw your gaze, implant an idea and give specific information about what readers should do.”⁴

2 Data and Methodology

Four different MTR stations were selected to determine if area demographics might determine selection of posters. Two MTR stations were in wealthier areas of Hong Kong, the major transit hubs of Kowloon Tong Station in Kowloon and Central Station on Hong Kong Island, and two were in working class areas of Mongkok and Sham Shui Po in Kowloon. These stations were visited on 22 and 27 March and 13 April 2022. Posters selected were limited to those in the passages leading to the stations and the main concourse in order to obtain a manageable amount of data.⁵

It was found that similar types of posters were found in all the stations, apart from posters related to specific district features, attractions, or buildings. There were three major poster types: by government departments, by the MTR Corporation, and consumer advertising. The MTR Corporation, a quasi-government-private company hybrid,⁶ also uses its space for self-promotion, travel information, and social service messages, while commercial advertisements reflect currently popular products among the public, “[g]overnment posters are records created for promoting policies, functions and activities.

3 Greg Myers, *Ad Worlds: Brands, Media, Audiences* (London: Edward Arnold, 1999), 96.

4 May L-Y. Wong, “Multimodality in Hong Kong Government Posters from the 1950s–1980s: An Appraisal Analysis and the Discursive Construction of Legitimation,” *Semiotica*, no. 246 (2022): 249–273.

5 All photographs of posters in the chapters were taken by the author.

6 According to MTR’s official website, the “MTR Corporation was established in 1975 as the Mass Transit Railway Corporation with a mission to construct and operate, under prudent commercial principles, an urban metro system to help meet Hong Kong’s public transport requirements. The sole shareholder was the Hong Kong Government. The Company was re-established as the MTR Corporation Limited in June 2000 after the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government sold 23% of its issued share capital to private investors in an Initial Public Offering. MTR Corporation shares were listed on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong on October 5, 2000.” See “Corporate Profile: Our Business,” MTR, last modified 2024, https://www.mtr.com.hk/en/corporate/overview/profile_index.html.

The messages conveyed are always simple, direct and meant to impress.”⁷ However, I was unable to confirm whether they are placed in strategic positions.

A number of posters to be analyzed in each of the three categories were selected. The criteria for selection were their connection to both recent and more long-standing issues. The analysis will mainly concern Hong Kong Government-related posters since the government can be said to be the framer of public discourse:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.⁸

For reasons of space, only COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test products were examined in the advertising section. Most commercial advertising in the MTR involves financial products of various kinds (Hong Kong is considered an international financial hub) and health and beauty products, notably, probiotic preparations. The following are the posters studied:⁹

Government entities	Posters
Inter-departmental Counterterrorism Unit	1. Run, Hide, Report
Office of the Communications Authority & Commerce and Economic Development Bureau	2. Spot & Report
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	3. Real Name SIM Card Registration
Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)	4. Green Burials
AFCD + Environment Bureau	5. Don't Feed the Wild Boars
	6. Restoring Nature

7 “Posters,” Government Records Service, last reviewed September 30, 2005, <https://www.grs.gov.hk/ws/Posters/html/index.htm>.
8 Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.
9 All photographs were taken by the author in situ at the selected MTR stations.

Non-Government entities	Posters
MTR Corporation	7. Stay Alert, Report Crime
	8. Anti-Covid Measures
	9. 330 Well-being Trips
Covid Rapid Antigen Tests	10. Indicaid
	11. Labnovation

3 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Multimodal analysis, an approach that integrates analysis of data from the viewpoint of different modes involved in meaning construction (verbal, visual, auditory, etc.), has become increasingly popular in recent years due to the development of computer-mediated technology. As stated by Theo van Leeuwen, when we look at posters and advertisements with both written text and images, we do not understand the text first, then the images, or the other way around. We “experience” them as a “single, multilayered, multimodal communicative act,” and all the elements form a “fusion” of the “component semiotic modalities.”¹⁰ It follows that posters should “speak for themselves.” Their size necessitates reduced content, and they must get to the point quickly. Therefore, what is omitted or included is important. Text, image, color, and design elements as well as intertextual relations are all crucial in attracting attention.

This analysis will be conducted on three levels: micro, meso, and macro. At the micro level, linguistic and visual means the producers of the advertisements or announcements used in creating meaning will be studied. At the meso level, the combination of text and image will be analyzed along with what is said explicitly or either hinted at or evoked. Obviously, intertextual knowledge is invoked by Hong Kong commuters as they live and work in the city and access other media. At the macro level, factors affecting the design of the advertisements (such as institutional factors) will be analyzed as well as the language used (Chinese/English).

Social phenomena, or the wider context, that is, the world outside the posters, will be the focus at the macro level of analysis. According to Teun van Dijk, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a methodology that is concerned with

10 Theo van Leeuwen, “Ten Reasons Why Linguists Should Pay Attention to Visual Communication,” in *Discourse and Technology Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, eds. Philip LeVine and Ron Scollon (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 7.

studying and analyzing texts of all kinds to reveal discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias.¹¹ It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts.¹² In a similar vein, Norman Fairclough defines CDA as

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.¹³

As Hong Kong's ruling ideology is connected to its status as a Special Administrative Region of China, some government posters of early 2022 relate to the aftermath of the 2019 protests, the introduction of the National Security Law in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Hong Kong's background as a Chinese society with Western characteristics also involves clashes between tradition and modernity.

Methodological guidelines for conducting CDA are accompanied by the exercise of describing the text, in this case, the multimodal text (the "snapshot"), which is a kind of inherency analysis (text, image, color, design elements) consisting of interpreting the relationship between both productive (the immediate context) and interpretive discursive processes that involve unfolding a text and explaining the complex relationship between discursive processes and social processes (see Fairclough's model) that led to the making of the text and why the posters were constructed and lie outside the text itself.¹⁴

This chapter is also partially informed by Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (D-HA) since it emphasizes more strongly than other CDA approaches that "discourse is always historical, that is, it is connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events which are happening at the

11 Teun van Dijk, *Ideology. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage, 1998).

12 Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction: Vol. 2. Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), 258–284.

13 Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 132–133.

14 Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 2010), 98.

same time or which have happened before.”¹⁵ This applies to the wider socio-cultural background beyond the immediate context of the text, in our case the selected posters. As the name implies, the historical dimension occupies a unique place in this approach. It denotes an attempt to systematically integrate a significant amount of background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of text. A fuller “social frame” in which the posters can be situated can thus be obtained with this mixed-methods approach.

4 Government Departments—Inter-Departmental Counterterrorism Unit: Run, Hide, Report

The following poster (Figure 3.1 below) first appeared on the Hong Kong Police website and Facebook page in September 2020 and then in MTR stations as well as on buses. Visual social semiotics accords an interpersonal meaning to an image, and this “refers to the relationship among the producer of the image, the people and things in the image, and the audience of the image” in a number of ways.¹⁶ Generally, it was designed as a single poster, but in the Central MTR station, the poster was in a triptic arrangement where three separate mini-posters (“Run,” “Hide,” “Report”) were placed adjacent to each other.

The three figures, the participants in the image, are each contained in their own “frame” representing each of the three actions a person should do in a violent situation. These figures dominate the poster and take up over three quarters of the poster space. They form a “U” shape, with the central figure crouching down in a self-protecting position. All three protagonists hold their hands close together (over their ears, a briefcase, or a phone). Their gaze is not towards the viewer but to a spot outside the poster to the left. This seems to indicate that the violent act is still happening, with an explosion taking place behind the first figure on the left.

Couched in negative terms in the text, first in Chinese then in English, the words “This is not a movie poster” (這不是電影海報) are used, along with the phrase “This could be a real-life matter” (而可能是現實情節). However, the Chinese reads a little differently and the latter part could have been

15 Ruth Wodak and Christoph Ludwig, “Introduction,” in *Challenges in a Changing World: Issues in Critical Discourse Analysis*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Christoph Ludwig (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1999), 12.

16 Bowan Yu, “Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Posters,” *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Art Studies: Science, Experience, Education* (Dordrecht: Atlantis Press, 2019), 407.



FIGURE 3.1 “Run, Hide, Report”



FIGURE 3.2 A recent Hong Kong movie poster

translated as “a real-life plot” (現實情節) in English. Immediately following “[t]his is not a movie poster,” the word “but” or “however” (*jì* 而) is used to suggest the possibility of action (it *could* happen in real life). We are not told what constitutes a “violent act,” the vagueness decontextualizes the situation, opening up the imagination to all kinds of possible dangers while invoking well-known Hong Kong movies that deal with gang violence and police action. Although this is “not a movie poster,” its design mimics one (see Figure 3.2).

It is worthwhile paying attention to the strategic use of color, typography, and layout in this poster. This poster’s focal point, is the directive, first in Chinese (萬一遇上暴力襲擊，緊記閃、避、求) and then in English—“In the event of a violent attack, remember – Run, Hide, Report,” with these italicized words in orange in both languages and separated by white commas. “Flee” (閃 lit. “flash”) is translated in English as “run” but has a more urgent tone in the Chinese version. “Stay away” (避 lit. “avoid”) does not quite have the connotation as “hide” but does encompass that meaning, while “request” (求 lit. “solicit”) implies a personal act of “requesting for help from others” (求助) in Chinese but the English message urges people to “report” different types of wrongdoing. The colour orange is also used for the predictive message “Maybe Coming” (但可能上映) at the bottom of the poster to suggest urgency as orange could be considered an “energetic color.”

In the middle of the poster and positioned across the mid-sections of all three figures are the verbs “閃 Run,” “避 Hide,” “求 Report” – all angled slightly upwards to the right, perhaps suggesting the path of possible escape. Underneath these verbs are instructions in white about what to do in case of a violent attack, first in Chinese, then in English: “Run” – Leave via a safe route; “Hide” – “if you can’t leave, take cover. Do not use any sound-emitting or luminous devices”; and “Report” – “call 999 for police assistance when you are safe.” Here, as in other areas of the poster, the Chinese is always bigger than the English text.

The tagline “Run, Hide, Report” is repeated towards the bottom half of the poster in extremely large white Chinese characters with English below the Chinese but without the commas (閃避求) – suggesting urgency. The first word is marked with “wings” (horizontal lines), suggesting the need for speedy escape, and the third word comes with WIFI icons (radiating arcs), symbolizing the need to reach out and call for help.

The last section of this poster uses different weighted elements to create an even composition that restores aesthetic order and equilibrium. The central catchphrase is flanked by two logos – a QR code on the right and the logo of ICTU (Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit) on the left to remind commuters to be vigilant. At the very bottom of the poster there is the text that literally means “do not want to screen this [reality show], but it may be coming” (不想上映 但可能上映). The first part of this catchphrase, which is in the colour white, is not translated in English. It is unclear why this has not been done; perhaps it has been used to emphasize the danger, as in “leave the threat unstated,” since the target audience for the poster are mainly the local Hong Kong Chinese public. The phrase “may be coming” (但可能上映 lit. “may be showing”) in Chinese and the English translation of this phrase are both in orange. The two logos provide strong directives to instruct the general public what to do and who to contact in the future. The symmetrical design emphasizes the love of not only visual order but also social order.

Extending the analysis of the poster to the wider social framework of the time, the average Hong Kong commuter would generally connect this poster to the then Chief Executive’s reframing of the protests as “riots.”¹⁷ The year 2020

17 Carrie Lam’s 林鄭月娥 “Letter to Hong Kong Citizens” about the need for the National Security Law” on May 29, 2020 stated the following: “Over the past year, the Hong Kong community has been traumatised. Violence by rioters has escalated, with illegal firearms and explosives posing a terrorist threat.” The then Chief Executive criticized a reporter who referred to the 2019 unrest as “protests” instead of “the Black Violence.” See Carrie Lam, “CE’s Letter to Hong Kong Citizens,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, May 29, 2020.

saw the introduction of a National Security law that laid emphasis on preventing any act that could be deemed to threaten national security. “Although the overall social situation has become calmer after the introduction of the national security law, we should not take it lightly,” according to Commissioner of Police Raymond Siu Chak-yee 蕭澤頤, inferring that there could still be underground or clandestine activities taking place. He encouraged the public to “inform authorities of any suspicious activities.”¹⁸ The setting up in late 2020 of a so-called “snitch hotline” to report breaches of the law made this easier.¹⁹

With an emphasis on surveillance and prevention of any possible violent or terrorist acts at the time, the Hong Kong police placed “Run, Hide, Report” and “Spot & Report” posters (to be analyzed below) in MTR stations to inform the public about what to do to prevent a potential terrorist attack. The terrorist threat level in Hong Kong was “moderate at the time the posters were made” which “means that there is the possibility of an attack, but there is no specific intelligence suggesting that Hong Kong is likely to be a target.”²⁰ Discourses of fear and of the future are thus intertwined.²¹

As noted by Adam Jaworski, Richard Fitzgerald, and Deborah Morris, a significant amount of news items refers to future events.²² In essence, the media

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202005/29/P2020052800745.htm>. See also Tom Grundy, “Hong Kong’s John Lee chides reporter for referring to 2019 ‘protests’ instead of ‘the black violence,’” *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 3, 2023, <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/05/03/hong-kongs-john-lee-chides-reporter-for-referring-to-2019-protests-instead-of-the-black-violence>.

- 18 Sammy Heung, “Hong Kong Police Chief Warns Terror Threat Still ‘Moderate,’ City Must ‘Remain Vigilant,’” *South China Morning Post*, January 29, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3165240/hong-kong-police-chief-warns-terror-threat-still>.
- 19 “Hong Kong: Snitch Hotline Gets More than 1,000 Calls,” *BBC News*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54835955>. A section of Article 33 of the National Security Law states that if charged with an offense under the Law, a lighter sentence may result if the person “... provides material information which assists in solving other criminal cases.” See Government of the HKSAR, “The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,” June 2020, <https://www.gld.gov.hk/egazette/pdf/20202448e/egn2020244872.pdf>.
- 20 “Local Terrorism Situation,” Inter-Departmental Counter Terrorism Unit, last revised September 8, 2022, <https://www.ictu.gov.hk/en/terrorist-threat/local-situation>.
- 21 Ming Liu, and Jingxue Ma, “The Politics of Fear in Hong Kong Protest Representations: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Study,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 21, no. 1 (2022): 37–59.
- 22 Adam Jaworski, Richard Fitzgerald, and Deborah Morris, “Certainty and Speculation in News Reporting of the Future: The Execution of Timothy McVeigh,” *Discourse Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 33–49; Adam Jaworski, Richard Fitzgerald, and Deborah Morris “Contesting Leaks in Radio News Broadcast,” *Journalism* 5, no. 2 (2004): 183–202.

construct “reality” for the public and speculates about situations that may never happen.²³ In a similar vein, Motti Neiger examined the “discourse of the future” as used by the Israeli press.²⁴ This discourse not only provides a framework for how to think about future change, it also impacts how people deal with it. Neiger found that the “discourse of the future” involved four possible futures: predictable future, informed assessment, speculative assessment, and conjectured future. The conjectured future has a “very high level of speculation” as this discourse has cultural and political importance because “it provides fertile ground for releasing trial balloons, magnifying threats, creating solidarity, and justifying acts of government” involving “worst-case scenarios” and “what would have happened if ...,” all of which relate to the local cultural and political norms in force at the time.²⁵ The potential for a “worst-case scenario” is used by various institutional bodies to assess possible risk through the presence of a known “deficit.”²⁶ Such risks can invoke the chance of a terrorist attack, which may harm stability and carries the risk of worsening.²⁷

5 Inter-Departmental Counterterrorism Unit: Spot & Report

These two posters are similar to the “Run, Hide, Report” poster. These were not always placed as a pair (as shown below) and there were also other slightly different versions.

The woman (a cleaner) and man (a server) are foregrounded on one side of the posters. One is scowling, while the other has raised eyebrows, and both are gazing at the suspicious figure. In the poster on the left, a hooded figure reaches for two white containers, while the male worker sees a person possibly looking at knives on his mobile phone (which can be seen by enlarging

23 This could be termed “editorialized reality” in the sense that TV “reality” shows cannot be “reality” but are scripted reality. This is made apparent in the disclaimer at the close of many of these shows’ credits, which state that the producers can decide on any aspect of the outcome (as in changing or restaging sequences).

24 Motti Neiger, “Media Oracles: The Political Import and Cultural Significance of News Referring to the Future,” *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 8, no. 3 (2007): 326–338. This study examined 1,745 headlines in Israeli newspapers over 18 years (1985–2003) and found that most of the main headlines dealt with future events.

25 Neiger, “Media Oracles,” 301.

26 Christopher Candlin and Jonathan Crichton, “Introduction,” in *Discourses of Deficit*, eds. Christopher Candlin and Jonathan Crichton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

27 In my doctoral work, I termed the words “stability & prosperity” as Hong Kong colloquates. See Jennifer Eagleton, “The ‘Ultimate Aim’: Discourses of Democratization in Post-handover Hong Kong” (PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2012).



FIGURE 3.3 Spot and report 1



FIGURE 3.4 Spot and report 2

the image). The figures' foregrounded positions seem to indicate that it is the viewers of these posters who should be doing the looking as we follow their suspicious gaze.

The Chinese taglines at the top of both posters emphasize this message: "If you see something suspicious today and do not report it, tomorrow you may be the one who is harmed" (今天是你看到可疑的東西不報告，明天你可能會受到傷害). The words "today" (今天) and "tomorrow" (明天) are in larger font, emphasizing the potentiality of a violent or terrorist act if suspicions are not acted upon. The Chinese character for "tomorrow" appears a step below "today." This suggests that while "today" be fine, "tomorrow" may not be.

Both posters showcase the slogan "Spot and Report" (見疑即報). One poster displays these words in the lower section (see Figure 3.3), while another poster puts this slogan in the upper section (see Figure 3.4). The layout of both posters emphasizes a "call for action," giving the reporting details at the bottom. The Chinese character for "suspicious" (疑) is double the size of the other characters and is in bolded white, making it particularly salient, while the English phrase "Spot and Report" appears in lighter white and is placed between "see (something) suspicious" and "immediately report it" (also in bolded white). As in the "Run, Hide, Report" poster, the bottom of the poster is in black in order to focus attention on the center of the posters.

The wider sociocultural context relates to what was said above about the previous poster. Looking at the Inter-departmental Counterterrorism Unit's website, terrorist activities can be summed up by the acronym SPOT – "Support

suspicious activity; Prepare for attacks; Online extremist materials; and Terrorist ideologies.”²⁸ The Hong Kong Security Bureau also issued a related booklet entitled “Hong Kong Safe Harbour – Protecting our City from a Terrorist Threat” to advise the public on what the government had been doing to keep the public safe, what everyone can do to help, and what to do in an emergency and to give advice on essential first aid.²⁹ The introduction to the booklet, “Be Alert, not Alarmed,” was written by John Lee 李家超, the then Secretary for Security and current Chief Executive of the Hong Kong government. The declarative “Be Alert, not Alarmed” tells us that we should not be fearful if people are observant about potential violent acts, yet fear remains, which takes into consideration past government discourse of “stability and prosperity” since violent acts threaten stability.

6 Office of the Communications Authority, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau: Real Name Registration of SIM Cards

This poster details a simple procedure for registering prepaid SIM cards with real names (實名登記). The implication is that people did not previously have to complete any registration when they purchased (pre-paid) SIM cards.

The man in the poster is actor Moses Chan (a SIM card with his name in Chinese and English – “Chan Ho” 陳豪 – is located just above his head). Displaying a closed smile, the actor wears a dark blue jacket over a white T-shirt against a light blue background. He gazes directly at the viewer, which could be interpreted as a stance of honesty and trustworthiness. Celebrities are frequently used in Hong Kong advertising. A number of theories attempt to explain how celebrity endorsement in advertising works. Grant McCracken elaborated a three-stage meaning transfer model.³⁰ This model proposes that an endorser’s credibility and expertise first transfer meaning to his or her public image; the endorser then transfers the meaning to what is being endorsed. Finally, the meaning is transferred to consumers, in this case, prepaid SIM card users.

28 In the Chinese version of the website, they still emphasize the acronym “SPOT” and elaborate on what each letter stands for in English. See “Be Alert for Terrorist Activities,” Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit, n.d. <https://www.ictu.gov.hk/en/ct-awareness/suspicious-activities/>.

29 “Hong Kong Safe Harbour,” Security Bureau, n.d. <https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/emergency/advice/securityc3.pdf>.

30 Grant McCracken, “Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 12 (1989): 315.



FIGURE 3.5 SIM card registration

The text in the poster is largely dark blue in the top half of the poster. The question “Have you registered?” implies that you should do so and that it is “Easy, Convenient, and Fast” (in italicized Chinese and English, indicating speed), with the registration details in red, stating that the “Registration Period” begins on March 1, 2022 and ends on February 23, 2023. The poster also details how to do this in different ways along with the information required of users. The bottom half (in lighter blue) of the poster is a flat line aligned with the actor’s head, indicating how easy it is to register. The overall color scheme of different shades of blue has a calming and tranquil effect.

The poster does not explain why real-name registration is necessary. In fact, after a specific date, all unregistered cards will be deactivated, but this is not stated on the poster. Behind the poster lies the wider sociocultural context, which includes a controversy over why registration was deemed necessary, another detail that is not given on the poster. Hong Kong officials stated that the revised rules would help in the fight against crime as registration would allow law enforcement agencies to access users’ personal information. The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau 邱騰華 on being asked whether these new measures would be used to investigate national security crimes, he replied “if the law allows for the obtaining of information

under such circumstances, that would be the case.”³¹ The National Security Law also grants police wider powers when investigating crimes under this law, including searching private property without a warrant and requesting internet service providers to remove information.

In the consultation paper released to the public concerning SIM card registration, prepaid SIM cards were depicted as a material factor in illegal activities. According to the Hong Kong Secretary for Security, the majority of telephone deception cases originated from outside Hong Kong.³² It is therefore difficult to see how real-name registration of local SIM cards could address the problem and lessen the incidence of phone scams even after the registration program comes into being. Yet the ratio of telephone deception cases involving local SIM cards versus overseas callers was not given in the consultation paper. Instead, the consultation paper argued that serious and violent crimes threaten public safety, hinting at the possibility that criminals may make use of local prepaid SIM cards to conduct their activities.³³ However the Internet Society Hong Kong Chapter (ISOCHK) pointed out that it is easy for serious criminals to obtain overseas SIM cards and that they may look for local scapegoats to bypass real-name SIM card registration.³⁴

Real-name registration has been in place in mainland China since 2010, and some saw this as another step towards “mainlandization” of Hong Kong’s systems.³⁵ When the scheme was first announced in January 2020, the Hong Kong government’s proposal invoked privacy concerns among IT experts, who argued that “[p]lacing arbitrary restrictions on who can and cannot communicate with the world contravenes the desire to develop and expand Hong Kong’s

31 See Rhoda Kwan, “Hong Kong’s Pre-paid SIM Card Users Must Register under New Law,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 2, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/06/02/hong-kongs-pre-paid-sim-card-users-must-register-under-new-law>.

32 “LCQ14: Telephone Deception Cases,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, January 13, 2021, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202101/13/P2021011300541/htm>.

33 “Real-name Registration Programme for SIM Card,” Legislative Council (Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting), March 15, 2021, <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr20-21/english/panels/itb/papers/itb20210315cb1-652-6-e.pdf>.

34 “Responses to the Real-Name Registration Programme for Sim Cards,” ISOCHK, February 25, 2021, <https://www.isoc.hk/news/response-to-the-real-name-registration-programme-for-sim-cards>.

35 The Zhuhai-Hong Kong-Macau bridge linking all three cities and the high-speed railway linking mainland China within the Hong Kong SAR were controversial infrastructure projects seen as mechanisms furthering integration in recent years.

economy.”³⁶ These experts considered that this new rule would undermine Hong Kong’s efforts to protect and promote freedom of speech and to maintain a favorable business environment, some of the tenets the government constantly emphasized.

The United Nations Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression reported in 2015 that “encryption and anonymity tools have become vital for journalists, activists, artists, academics and others to exercise their professions and their human rights freely.”³⁷ Instead, the SIM card registration surveillance mechanisms “function simultaneously as deterrence and direct assaults on any dissenting views.”³⁸ For example, in January 2021, the Hong Kong authorities for the first time used the National Security Law as grounds for blocking a pro-democracy website, *HKChronicles*, compelling mobile providers to disrupt access to the website, which compiled information on anti-government protests and personal data on police and their supporters.³⁹

7 Food and Environmental Hygiene Department: Green Burials

Burial traditions are important in many cultures, and Hong Kong is no exception. However, funeral services such as those shown in the two posters are not typical in Hong Kong.

The poster (Figure 3.6) has “Green Burial Love Living On” written in white Chinese characters (white being the traditional color of mourning), with the English translation immediately underneath. The “Love” in the phrase “Love Living On” has an extended tail before the letter, indicating that this

36 Tom Grundy, “Hong Kong Mulls Mainland-style Real Name SIM Card Registration for Mobile Phones,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 29 January 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/01/29/just-in-hong-kong-mulls-mainland-style-real-name-sim-card-registration-for-mobile-phones>.

37 “Human rights, Encryption and Anonymity in a Digital Age,” Office of the Head of the Commission for Human Rights, OHCHR, July 1, 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2015/06/human-rights-encryption-and-anonymity-digital-age>. See also “Response to the Real Name Registration Programme for SIM Cards,” ISOC, February 25, 2021, <https://www.isoc.hk/news/response-to-the-real-name-registration-programme-for-sim-cards>.

38 Sharon Yam, “Hong Kong’s SIM Card Registration Plan Aims to Sow Fear, Distrust and Self-censorship,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 5, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/02/05/hong-kongs-sim-card-registration-plan-aims-to-sow-fear-distrust-and-self-censorship/>.

39 Yam, “Hong Kong’s SIM Card Registration Plan.”



FIGURE 3.6 Green burial 1



FIGURE 3.7 Green burial 2

journey smoothly flows into the future, “Living On”. The position of these words in the sky indicates spiritual transcendence.

In the center left of the poster, the most prominent position, the Chinese text (告知家人你身後心願，於綠色殯葬中央名冊登記) is followed by English as “Share your wish with your family members and sign up in the Green Burial Central Register,” with “Green Burial Central Register” (綠色殯葬中央名冊) in dark green in both languages and the words capitalized in English. This urging to sign up implies that the family may not know their loved one’s wishes or perhaps could override these wishes, especially if they were made only informally.

In between the text are two newly sprouting leaves, with smaller sprouting leaves also shown between the words at the top of the poster. Large sprouting leaves are also emerging from the soil at the bottom of the poster in an “opening up” position, emphasizing freshness and potential for new growth upwards. The soothing greens in the poster indicate harmony and peace and being one with nature. The green theme of the poster is horizontally arranged (framed) with a darker green highlighting the new shoots, changing to darker green to light blue and then the darker blue of the sky, which is dotted with fluffy white clouds. The far-off horizon indicates the idea of future generations to come.

The design of one poster highlights different typographic modes as the white Chinese text (撒灰於海上/海闊天空 lit. Scatter ashes at sea/Spacious ocean and sky) is displayed vertically from right to left (see Figure 3.7). The English translation “Scatter ashes at sea/Join the boundless/and be free” is given next to it in the horizontal plane. The poster’s major color scheme is blue – sparkling blue water and clear blue skies and floating blurry rose petals drifting horizontally across the poster, a subtle way of hinting at the act of scattering ashes. There are two photographs of the sea-scattering of ashes in the upper left of the poster.

Rather than showing new growth as in the first poster, this second poster indicates dispersal in an intangible form. The darker pink circle in the bottom right-hand corner is highly salient because of its density of color and relationship with the paler pink of the rose petals indicating what viewers could do to remember their deceased loved one. By signing up for such a burial, families can receive a “commemorative wooden artwork for green burial” that is “set up with a memorial post box for families to express feelings and share their thoughts about their lost loved ones” as shown by the presence of envelopes. Presumably, the rustic-looking boat (looking somewhat like a baby’s cradle) at the bottom of the pink circle is the artwork they would be given.⁴⁰

While Hong Kong people have become much “greener” and more open to conservation efforts in recent decades, traditional views of death remain prominent. The promotion of “green burials” (綠色殯葬) is a pragmatic function due to the lack of space for burials and the cost of purchasing such space.⁴¹ Most Hong Kong people keep the remains of family members in ceramic urns placed in columbarium niches about the size of a shoebox. In a society in which ancestor worship is a major part of the culture, many, especially the older generation, see the idea of ashes-scattering as going against tradition. Custom dictates that families return their deceased relatives to their birthplace and bury them or preserve their ashes so that future generations can pay homage and receive blessings. Said one cemetery visitor, “[w]e want to give our ancestors a

40 Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, *Internet Memorial Website*. <https://www.memorial.gov.hk>.

41 Matthew Keegan, “Hong Kong Real Estate Now More Expensive for the Dead than the Living,” *The Guardian*, 23 April 2019. “A ground burial plot can cost anywhere between HK\$3m (£300,000) and HK\$5m, but in the city’s congested cemeteries, vacancies rarely become available. Land is so scarce that 90% of the 48,000 people a year who die in Hong Kong are cremated. But increasingly finding the space even to store ashes is becoming nigh on impossible.” See also Scott Fong, “What is the Cost of a Burial in Hong Kong?” *Algordanza*, 22 June 2018, <https://www.algordanza.com.hk>.

home, someplace to stay; ... How can you do that if you just throw their ashes all over the place?"⁴² The new practice is problematic because the next generation is expected to follow the routine of sweeping the tomb and praying in order to offer good wishes for both the deceased, especially during the Ching Ming Festival (清明節) in spring, and Chung Yeung/Double Ninth Festival (重陽節) in autumn, when family members express filial piety towards the deceased. Cemeteries are well attended during these festivals.

As mentioned above, the government could set up a memorial website for the deceased as an alternative to tombstones and cemetery visits, with virtual fruit offerings also available. There are also regular public service announcements filled with references to rebirth and rejuvenation on TV as well as posters to convince the public that this is a pragmatic and environmentally friendly option and does not go against tradition. The following is an example of this kind of message:

After scattering the ashes into the ground or sea, they will become a part of the life cycle of nature and in line with a purpose of letting the deceased return to nature. They will act as a natural ingredient to help the plant grow. Plants can receive the nutrients and the native areas are preserved.⁴³

This kind of explanation also reflects the Buddhist and Daoist mindset of being one with other creatures and the earth. Chinese funeral rituals are combinations of Daoist and Buddhist ideologies, and it would seem prudent to emphasize this aspect to those seeking to bury a loved one.⁴⁴

Judging by the number of deaths and green burials, the messages has not been totally successful. Over the past decade, the number of green burials increased from 3,400 in 2013 to about 9,450 in 2022, accounting for 15.4% of deaths in that year.⁴⁵

42 Javier C. Hernández, "Hong Kong's Drive for 'Green Burials' Clashes with Tradition," *The New York Times*, 22 October, 2015.

43 Cynthia Lau, Hilary H.L. Yee, Tommy K.C. Ng, and Ben Yuk Fai Fong, "Green Burial," *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management* 15, no. 2 (2020): 3.

44 See Yewen Qu, "Green Funeral, a New Imagination of Death" (Master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2021).

45 "LCQ17 Green burial," Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, February 22, 2023, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202302/22/P2023022200308.htm>.



FIGURE 3.8

"Don't Feed" – Photograph courtesy of the AFCD

8 Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department: Don't Feed

Despite Hong Kong's high-density living, there is significant green space and wildlife. This encroachment occasionally leads to clashes between wildlife and humans. The following poster refers to interactions between wild boars (also called wild pigs) and humans.

The poster (Figure 3.8) is meant to be read vertically with the word "Don't" (唔好) providing the overall command to the viewer. The Chinese at the top of the poster (唔好餵喇) is a colloquial Cantonese expression for "Don't Feed Laa," and is emotionally stronger than "Don't Feed" in English due to the use of the Cantonese sentence final particle "laa³" (喇). Both words are in dark orange for "Don't" and its Chinese equivalent and are joined together or underlined for emphasis.

This particular poster uses illustrations rather than photographs to highlight the damage done by wild boars. The background is a cityscape, buildings, cars, and fences, suggesting a roadway, and there is a border between this place and a public area (likely a country park). Two marching cartoon-like figures with sweat or tears of fear running down their faces (one looks left and the other looks right) as they are surrounded by wild boars. Text overlays the figures, indicating danger. A large wild boar is seen to the bottom left of the poster.

The boars seem to encircle the figures in an anti-clockwise manner, with the viewer's eyes possibly also following this movement.

Four situations may occur if people feed the wild boars, and these are given first in Chinese in darker orange, followed by English in lighter orange. These four situations, which are prefaced with an exclamation mark inside a yellow "danger" triangle are: 1. Spreading germs (傳播病菌); 2. Threatening traffic safety (危害道路安全); 3. Deteriorating environmental hygiene (影響環境衛生); and 4. Increasing wild pigs' aggressiveness (令野豬更具攻擊性). The ordering of these dangers suggests decreasing severity. Note that gerunds are used for all four injunctions, indicating both the situation's status quo and continuing occurrence if these practices continue. At the bottom of the poster are acts that provide a reason for not feeding the wild boars: "In the past 4 years, more than 30 injuries caused by wild pigs with over 40 victims" (近四年, 野豬傷人個案共三十多宗, 傷者共四十多人). The bright yellow background and black font draw viewers' attention to highlight the danger of being injured by wild animals.

The poster does not give any source to these statistics, but these figures presumably come from a government department and are therefore presumably believable. However, looking at the issue outside the poster in related texts shows that this may not be correct:

Over the past decade, the number of sightings and nuisance reports involving boars rose from 225 in 2011 to 1,002 in 2020. There were 36 cases of injuries caused by wild pigs over the 10-year period. There were 1,417 reports of boar sightings and nuisance, and 22 cases of injuries caused by wild pigs.⁴⁶

The government believes that the reason the wild boars go into urban areas is that people feed them. Many urban estates put their rubbish out for collection in sealed plastic bags, which would not be easily opened by a wild animal. Rubbish bins provided are often left overflowing and without a secure lid. Furthermore, the building of housing developments and high rises near country parks and upmarket leafy areas where these animals are found means that their natural habitat is compromised, forcing them to migrate to more populated regions.

46 Clifford Lo, "Hongkongers Attacked by Wild Boar while Hiking in Country Park," *South China Morning Post*, April 20, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3174895/2-hongkongers-attacked-wild-boar-while-hiking-country-park>.

In 2024, the government passed a bill that raises “the maximum penalty for feeding wild animals to a HK\$100,000 fine and imprisonment for one year.”⁴⁷ Boars found in urban areas would be “captured for humane dispatch with a view to reducing their number and nuisance.”⁴⁸ A strategy of “bait-and-cull” was introduced on 12 November 2021, two days after a police officer was bitten in the leg. On 17 November of that year, a team from the Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) captured and killed several boars on Hong Kong Island. This stirred up a citywide public outcry. Though the action was criticized by animal rights groups and others on social media, the AFCD said it would carry out such operations regularly, giving “priority to sites with large numbers of wild pigs, and locations with past injury cases or with wild pigs that may pose risks to members of the public.”⁴⁹

9 Environment Bureau and Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department: Reawakening Mother Nature

Though Hong Kong is a highly dense urban setting, of a total 1,114 square kilometers of land, about 40% consists of country parks and special areas. Scenically, Hong Kong has a landscape of sandy beaches and rocky foreshores, mountains almost 1,000 meters high, woodlands, and mountain ranges covered by open grassland.

This poster (Figure 3.9) contains little text. Instead, the image dominates the poster. The green canopy that forms the central part of the poster is a map of Hong Kong, which may be overlooked at a cursory glance.

The Chinese script (untranslated) says “Reawakening Mother Nature” (復甦的大自然) is in light gray on the top left of the poster. The typographic design highlights a fluid style, emphasizing the importance of reviving (復甦) Mother Nature (大自然). A cursive line above the Chinese indicates mountains, with the green not quite fitting in with the fluid lines, suggesting the “unboundedness” of the environment, indicating human connectivity and oneness with

47 Kelly Ho, “Hongkongers Could Face HK\$100k Fine, Year in Prison, for Feeding Wild Animals Including Pigeons,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, May 24, 2024.

48 “AFCD Takes New Measures to Reduce Nuisance and Number of Wild Pigs,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, November 12, 2021, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202111/12/P202111200615.htm>.

49 “AFCD’s Response to Media Enquiries on Injury Cases Caused by Wild Pigs,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, November 26, 2021, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202111/26/P202111260868.htm#:~:text=The%20AFCD%20will%20continue%20to,safety%20and%20maintain%20public%20hygiene.>



FIGURE 3.9
“Awakening Mother Nature” –
Photograph courtesy of the AFCD

nature. At the bottom of the poster, the Chinese and the English versions of the text emphasize “Thriving Together With Nature” (人與自然，共昌共榮). In smaller white Chinese and English text, information is given concerning an education program by the Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to promote Hong Kong’s biodiversity to the public.

In effect, the poster is a compression of the many activities available in the 24 country parks that “have been designated for the purposes of nature conservation, countryside recreation, and outdoor education.”⁵⁰ An uphill hiking trail is shown to the right. A person is tending a garden plot on the lower right side, while picnickers, birdwatchers, yoga practitioners, tree huggers, and painters are also shown. Nature is represented by birds, butterflies, turtles, and a

⁵⁰ “Hong Kong: The Facts – Country Parks and Special Areas,” Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department, AFCD, n.d. https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/country/cou_lea/the_facts.html.

monkey (on a tree top). While this suggests a harmonious and peaceful scene, in the wider sociocultural context, it does not deal with the fact that ongoing urban sprawl and the need for more residential space threaten the existence of these rural spaces as well as animals (as discussed in the previous poster). However, many members of the public argue that not enough is being done to maintain or promote country parks and related activities, which are “shabbily maintained, badly signposted, lacking facilities, and even mooted as sites for property developers.”⁵¹

When former Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying 梁振英 proposed building 30,000 flats on the fringes of Tai Lam Country Park in 2021, this led to a public outcry.⁵² Country parks and golf courses are considered easy targets for more public housing by developers. In fact, Hong Kong has ample brown-field sites (棕地).⁵³ However, elite interests and real estate developers are not keen on using such sites.⁵⁴ In practice land supply is kept as low as possible so that the government can raise huge sums when it sells the land to property developers.

10 Non-Government Organization—MTR Corporation: Stay Alert, Report Crime!

In busy transit hubs, petty theft can be a regular occurrence due to the crush of commuters during peak commuting time.

Next to the MTR logo at the top right of the poster (Figure 3.10) is the Chinese slogan “caring for life’s journeys (心繫生活每一程)” which appears on all MTR-produced posters. The narrative refers to the risk of items being stolen from innocent commuters by people in close proximity. The intent of criminal action in the poster is clear from the evil grin on the face of the woman about

51 Ed Peters, “Why are Hong Kong’s Country Parks Treated as if no One Cares About Them? Apart from Property Developers, of Course,” *South China Morning Post*, September 12, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/short-reads/article/3148137/why-are-hong-kongs-country-parks-treated-if-no>.

52 Joyce Ng and Rachel Yeo, “Ex-Hong Kong Leader Revives Plan to Build Public Flats at Country Park, Fuelling Rumours of Run for Top Office,” *South China Morning Post*, May 13, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3133411/ex-hong-kong-leader-revives-plan-build-public-flats-country>.

53 A brownfield site is previously developed land with potential for being redeveloped.

54 Roger Nissim, “Leave the Country Parks and Golf Courses Alone, Hong Kong has Ample Brownfields with Public Housing Potential,” *South China Morning Post*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/business/article/3136309/leave-country-parks-and-golf-courses-alone-hong-kong-has-ample-brownfields>.

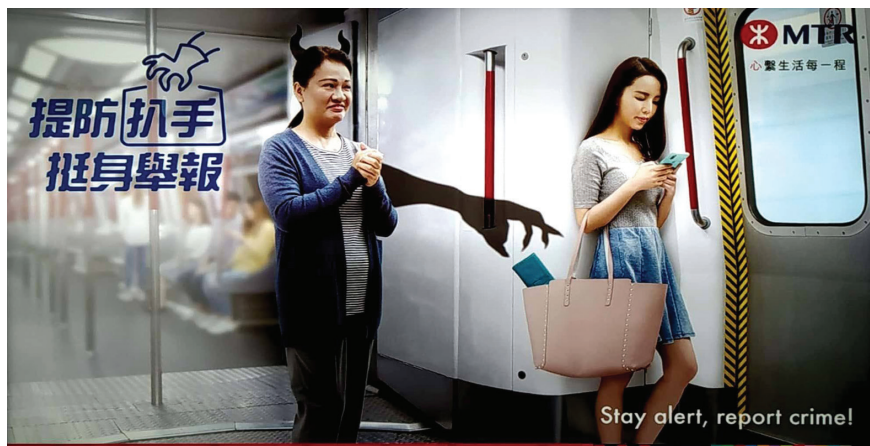


FIGURE 3.10 Stay alert

to commit an act of theft. The woman's facial features seem coarser than the potential victim's face, feeding into the stereotype of the "ugly criminal." The two "horns" on the woman's head also emphasizes this stereotype.

The poster is in horizontal format showing the unwariness of the potential victim. The risk of a criminal action is also indicated by the shadowy arm extending outwards to snatch the wallet out of the girl's open bag.

The theme of the poster highlights the "humans beware humans" motif. The English text "Stay alert, report crime!" is given in white at the bottom right-hand corner of the poster. The Chinese text "提防扒手挺身舉報!" literally "Beware of pickpockets, stand up (挺身) and report them!" is much larger and in dark blue, and is seen against a blurred-out image of other passengers in the train. The characters for "pickpockets" (扒手) are highlighted by being enclosed in an "open bag" with a cartoon hand reaching down to take out the contents. This could also be an illusion to be "aware" of potential criminality in the MTR.

11 MTR: Anti-COVID Measures

Hong Kong was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic against the background of the SARS epidemic in 2003, which severely traumatized a city that views itself as a "world-class city."⁵⁵ There were a number of posters that

55 Jennifer Eagleton, "SARS: 'It's as Bad as We Feared but Dared Not Say,'" *English Today* 20, no. 1 (2004): 34–45. See also John Flowerdew, "The Discursive Construction of a World-Class City," *Discourse & Society* 15, no. 5 (2004): 579–605.

highlighted the MTR's Chinese slogan of "caring for life's journeys" (心繫生活每一程) as noted above.

In one poster (not shown here, due to poor quality of the image), robots of various shapes and sizes are grouped together and placed in a dotted circle, with whitish light and twinkling stars emanating from the robots into blueish-green surroundings in a circular formation, thus drawing the viewers' gaze towards these items and indicating the effectiveness of cleaning and disinfection work. The robots are doing something to rid Hong Kong of the virus. The poster's edge is in darker blue, suggesting that this area needs further cleaning and disinfecting.

In this poster, the text in large white Chinese characters in the upper third section "Over 100 cleaning & disinfection robots dispatched throughout the network to protect our health (過百清潔消毒機械人/全員出動守護健康)" and "Together, let's fight the COVID! (一齊對抗變種病毒)" is shown beneath the information about the robots in smaller lighter white text. This is also stated in English in the bottom left corner of the poster.



FIGURE 3.11 Anti-Covid 1

The poster shown above (Figure 3.11) focuses on how a person could protect themselves from the virus. It has large Chinese text in white: “Always wear a mask, wrap your mask in a tissue before disposal (時刻戴好口罩/棄置前，用紙巾包好).” This is followed by the English version – “Together, let’s us fight the COVID [sic]!” The background is a darkish green and consists of three bubbles and three twinkling stars at the top of the poster. The large bubble to the right contains the MTR’s Mascot—*Tit³ Zai²* (鐵仔) in Cantonese, *Tiezai* in Mandarin, or T Chai (T-boy) in English, a cartoon character that personifies the train. In the design, the three hairs on the top of the head represent the panto-graph of the MTR train, the face is the head of the MTR train, and the MTR logo is in the middle of the abdomen. The design refers to the Chinese-made trains that will be put into service on urban lines in the future.



FIGURE 3.12 Anti-Covid 2

Other posters aimed to “spread positive energy amid the pandemic, specially designed T Chai posters with QR codes to share well-being tips” (Figure 3.12).⁵⁶

Many other similar posters were in the same configuration, including the T Chai image with a large heart above and behind it a “well-being tip” inside it in a warm pink color on a pale blue background. The personal, conversational tone and the large, centered Chinese text (which literally means “[I] Care for you/[Let’s] keep in contact/[Hope] it is not overburdening you with it.” 關心您/Keep住聯絡/點算長氣) are fundamentally different from the English text apart from the use of white color. In the bottom right of the poster, the English message is “Keeping in touch with those you love keeps you strong.” There is also a QR code in a smaller pink heart on the bottom right side for access to more well-being tips. The reference to “dayday330” on the top left side of the poster represents a campaign by the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association. Since (as mentioned earlier) the MTR Corporation’s motto is “caring for life’s journeys,” it also claims to ensure passengers will remain calm and harmonious. As implied in earlier posters, blue stands for tranquility, security, trust, and reliability.

However, in the wider socio-cultural context, the MTR was not considered so harmonious a corporation in 2019 during the months-long anti-extradition law protests, when the organization provided extra trains and extended hours to accommodate the large number of protesters. However, on August 23 of that year, Chinese state media criticized the MTR for behaving inappropriately by helping Hong Kong protesters to get home safely.⁵⁷ During the protests, the MTR often shut down stations at will, either for the day or by closing a few hours early with vague statements blaming “the situation” while claiming on platform notices that a “public event” was occurring. Some saw this as “collective punishment” for those who took part in the protests.⁵⁸ For weeks

56 “MTR Shares Well-being Tips from T Chai and Celebrities to Send Positive Energy amid COVID-19,” MTR Corporation, March 22, 2022, https://www.mtr.com.hk/archive/corporate/en/press_release/PR-22-021-E.pdf.

57 Cannix Yau, Jasmine Siu, and Michelle Wong, “MTR Corporation Wins Injunction to Keep Hong Kong Protesters Off Railway Property After Protests at Stations This Week,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, August 23, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/transport/article/3024161/mtr-corporation-may-seek-injunction-keep-hong-kong>.

58 Ilaria Maria Sala, “Hong Kong’s MTR was an Unlikely Target for Protests – Until It Showed Who Its Daddy Was,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 12 October 2019, <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/10/12/hong-kongs-mtr-unlikely-target-protests-showed-daddy>. See also Jennifer Eagleton, *Discursive Change in Hong Kong Sociopolitical Dynamics, Metaphor, and One Country, Two Systems* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022), Chapter 8.

afterwards, ticket machines damaged during protests had notices on them saying “vandalized” rather than “damaged.” In Chinese, “vandalized” means objects were “destroyed with evil intentions” (惡意破壞). In fact, it was found that some of these “vandalized” machines were fully operational.⁵⁹ Since the MTR is a major real estate developer as well as a transit network and a hybrid government-private entity, it probably felt that it had no choice but to follow demands from higher powers.

12 Advertisements: COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Tests

The following two MTR advertising products were listed on the Hong Kong Government’s approved list as available for purchase.⁶⁰ These will be looked at separately and the wider sociocultural context applied to both.

12.1 Labnovation

The first poster is for Labnovation, which is certified by the Shenzhen Government as a “Shenzhen High-Tech Enterprise,”⁶¹ while the second product is a Hong Kong-based company.



FIGURE 3.13 Labnovation

⁵⁹ Sala, “Hong Kong’s MTR.”

⁶⁰ “Listed Rapid Antigen Tests for COVID-19 Under MDACS,” Department of Health, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, last updated June 15, 2023, <https://www.mdd.gov.hk/en/whats-new/rapid-antigen-tests-covid-19/index.html>. The RATs listed are from the Mainland and Hong Kong only.

⁶¹ See the company website: “About Us,” Labnovation Technologies Inc, <https://www.labnovation.com/about/#:~:text=Labnovation%20has%20been%20certified%20by,as%20well%20as%20technical%20Support>.

In the poster (Figure 3.13), a test-reading device is shown alongside the kit's packaging. The woman in the upper right-hand circle has a swab inserted into her nasal cavity to show how the test is carried out.

The name "Labnovation" is a blending of "laboratory" and "innovation" (with a stylized "A"). The Chinese text says "Novel coronavirus rapid antigen test kit (新冠病毒快速抗原檢測套裝)" in large blue characters, the blue continuing on the kit's packaging to the left. Underneath is a small German flag and the characters "registered in Germany (德國註冊)" as well as the stylized letters "CE" (an acronym for the French *Conformite Europeenne*) and "recognized and accessed" in Chinese (歐盟認證). The stylized letters and "recognized and accessed" appear on many products traded on the extended single market in the European Economic Area (EEA), signifying that "products sold in the EEA have been assessed to meet high safety, health, and environmental protection requirements."⁶² These affiliations most likely imply the effectiveness of the product as it has been validated by Europe and thus lives up to the innovative aspect of its name.

12.2 INDICAID

Compared to Labnovation, INDICAID (妥析) was more prominently displayed in MTR stations, especially in Kowloon Tong MTR station, with both sides of the long corridor to the East Rail Line in the direction of the Mainland Chinese border were lined with Indicaid advertisements.

A deep purple background is used for all these advertisements, and a lighter shade is used on the packaging, which may denote the clinical seriousness of the product as the viewer's gaze is drawn to the test packaging and its different configurations.

The company name, INDICAID, is a portmanteau of "indicator" and "aid." The lettering is in white, while "aid" is in light blue to emphasize its role as an "aid to diagnosis." In below (Figure 3.14), the Chinese text states: "Last year we sold 20 million boxes; this year we hope to sell fewer and fewer (上年我們賣出2000萬盒，今年我們希望愈賣愈少)." The words "fewer and fewer" are underlined in blue, which uses "plain folks" appeal to show that the company shares common people's wish that the pandemic will end soon. Underneath in smaller white script is written "We wish the virus will retreat in 2022 (祝願2022病毒退散)." The boxes are standing up, giving salience to the effectiveness of the product since standing tall denotes a position of strength. Only the name of the product appears in English, and there is no English in the advertisement apart from the product's name.

62 European Commission, "CE Marking," Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs, n.d. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/ce-marking_en.



FIGURE 3.14 INDICAID 1



FIGURE 3.15 INDICAID 2

In poster above (Figure 3.15), there is again no English text, while the Chinese text says that “We are scared of infection with no symptoms, but more afraid of transmission with no symptoms (害怕無症狀感染，更怕無症狀傳染).” The smaller text underneath, also in Chinese, says: INDICAID “has been proven in large clinical trials to effectively detect asymptomatic individuals and help protect the health of family members and loved ones (獲大型臨床測試實証，有效檢測無症狀患者，助你守護親人摯友健康).” “Proven in large clinical trials” and “detect asymptomatic individuals” are underlined in blue. The kits float in space (including packaging and the reading device), suggesting positivity as they arch upwards, as well as the diminishing use of the tests.



FIGURE 3.16 INDICAID 3



FIGURE 3.17 INDICAID 4

The tagline of the poster (Figure 3.16) is half in Chinese, half in English, with the English capitalized in parallel construction on separate lines: “I need to stay positive, but first I have to be negative.” “Encourage everyone to test as much as possible; 20 minutes is all you need – STAY NEGATIVE (鼓勵大家願檢盡檢, 用20分鐘時間一起[保持陰性]).” In the poster above (Figure 3.17), the Chinese states: “The easiest human to human transmission is hope (最容易人傳人的是希望).”

The Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits in this poster and its components mimic the physical structure of the coronavirus, indicating that the test will effectively detect the virus, if present. The product also promotes itself as a “Hong Kong

brand with locally developed technology”⁶³ with the ability to detect coronavirus variants (including Delta and Omicron). The product is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), as seen in the upper left-hand corner of the poster. There is no English in the poster, except for the name of the COVID variants and the product’s name.

In the wider sociocultural context, in March and April 2020, COVID-19 rates increased in Hong Kong. To ensure “early identification, early isolation, and early treatment,” the Hong Kong Government procured RAT kits in bulk and gave them out to the public for free.⁶⁴ Teachers, schoolchildren, and others often needed to provide evidence of testing every day in their schools and workplaces. It was speculated that mainland China’s zero-COVID policy (清零政策) was the reason why Hong Kong also had to maintain RAT and other COVID-19 testing as part of what the government called its “dynamic zero” COVID policy (動態清零).

Though the dynamic zero policy was not well-defined, the Hong Kong Government stated that “Hong Kong must cut the transmission chains as quickly as possible,” with the aim of achieving dynamic zero infection. Failing this, the consequences could be dire.⁶⁵ The “Dynamic zero-COVID” strategy is a transitional strategy to be adopted after a successful containment strategy, when the population’s immunity barrier is not yet established in the face of continued risk of foreign importation and high transmission of variants.⁶⁶

The core of the dynamic zero-COVID policy was “to take effective and comprehensive measures to deal with localized Covid-19 cases, to quickly cut off the transmission chain, and to end the epidemic in a timely manner).”⁶⁷ This involved lockdowns and other containment strategies. Many in Hong Kong criticized the continuance of practices such as mask-wearing, tracing applications, vaccine passes, and social distancing as well as lengthy quarantine after most countries had eliminated them.

63 Please see the company’s website: <https://www.indicaid.com/en/products/covidantigen>.

64 “Stepping Up Testing and Continuation of Targeted Group Testing Scheme,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, September 19, 2020, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202009/19/P2020091900029.htm>.

65 “Dynamic Zero Infection Most Effective Way to Fight Epidemic,” Press Releases, The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, January 30, 2022, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/30/P2022013000492.htm>.

66 Jue Liu, Min Liu, and Wannian Liang, “The Dynamic COVID-Zero Strategy in China,” *China CDC Weekly* 4, no. 4 (2022): 74. <https://weekly.chinacdc.cn/fileCCDCW/journal/article/ccdcw/2022/4/PDF/CCDCW220021.pdf>.

67 Ibid., 74.

The continuing practice of daily COVID updates and the emphasis on “dire consequences” if a dynamic zero policy was not carried out again shows that the discourse of fear informs government actions in Hong Kong. In a similar vein, during the SARS epidemic in 2003, the Hong Kong authorities feared that Hong Kong’s reputation as a “world-class city” would be undermined by being the main focal point of the epidemic.⁶⁸

13 Conclusion

This chapter looks at poster advertisements displayed in four MTR stations and analyses them using a combined multimodal and critical discourse analysis framework. I argue that the Hong Kong Government “frames” Hong Kong in the present in terms of past situations (in particular the political events of 2019) as well as situations such as the lack of space for traditional cultural practices such as burial) and how the future is speculated upon (including the need for vigilance for national security and terrorism). William Faulkner once stated “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁶⁹ At the same time, Slavoj Žižek argues that the future is “without form, shape or color: it demands yet exceeds all figuration.”⁷⁰ It is therefore a valuable exercise in analyzing the present—24 years after transiting to Special Administrative Region of China status—to look back at the past in light of texts, in this case Hong Kong MTR posters, in March and April 2022.

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68 Jennifer Egleton, “SARS: ‘It’s as Bad as We Feared but Dared Not Say,’” 34–45. See also John Flowerdew, “The Discursive Construction of a World-Class City,” *Discourse & Society* 15, no. 5, (2004): 579–605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926504045033>; this zero-COVID policy was replaced by a new strategy: in 2020, the Hong Kong Government argued that the “new normal” is to “co-exist with the virus” (與病毒共存). See <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202007/15/P2020071500327.htm?fontSize=1>.

69 William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1919), 85.

70 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 274–275.

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TV Special: Finding a Hong Kong Story

Vinton Poon

1 Introduction

In February 2023, the Communications Authority ordered local free-to-air TV and radio broadcasters to transmit no less than 30 minutes of patriotic programming on national education, national identity, and the National Security Law week. Children's programming was reduced by 50%, but the TV programming quota for "young persons" was to double.¹ The Chief Executive's approval of the measure means that five free-to-air TV licensees—TVB, Viu TV, HOY TV, Commercial Radio, Metro Radio—are affected. While the mandated content can promote government policies and increase a sense of public responsibility, it can also spread propaganda and discredit media organizations. For this reason, it is crucial to recognize that audiences can exercise agency in accepting or questioning media narratives.

In this chapter, I highlight a 2019 all-star primetime TV show—*Hong Kong Our Home Concert* (唱好香港演唱會)—that was, as proclaimed by the program itself, specially designed to "inject positive energy to Hong Kong during a challenging time."² My goal is to focus on the show's opening narrative and viewers' responses in order to investigate the question of audience agency. I first analyze the narrative, in particular how the "reality-based" opening monologue frames Hong Kong in a particular manner. Next, I invited a selected group of pro-democracy young persons to read the narrative, and provide comments, which would serve as data for this study. My hypothesis is that producers can edit scenes and control a show's frame and content, but people can distinguish fact from fiction and may or may not internalize the intended message. My qualitative research indicates that audience are aware that commoners onscreen are edited and transformed to become stereotyped "characters." Given the increasing polarization of Hong Kong society, I discuss people's

1 Tom Grundy, "Hong Kong's Free-to-Air Broadcasters Ordered to Transmit 30-mins of Patriotic and Security Programming Per Week," *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 15, 2023.

2 *Hong Kong Our Home Concert* [唱好香港演唱會], aired September, 14, 2019, on TVB, https://programme.tvb.com/tc/hongkongconcerttbc_123446/episodes/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%94%B1%E5%A5%BD%E6%BC%94%E5%94%B1%E6%9C%83.

perceptions of the constructed narrative and the reasons why the framing fails to influence their evaluation.

The concept of framing is based on the assumption that the subjective arrangement of words, images, or stereotypes can affect the way we think. In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman defines a “frame” as “definitions of the situation [that] are built up in accordance with the principle of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them.” Frames work to achieve “the organization of experience.”³ Goffman argues that information is organized through various means, but primarily through language. Words can bias people to view reality in a certain way and then direct them to make sense of a current situation or event or of members of society. On a similar note, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf also suggest that language binds and affects one’s understanding of reality, at least to some extent.⁴ The structure of a language invites individuals to foreground certain information while backgrounding other content; it also invites us to focus on some aspects of reality while ignoring the rest. Although Sapir and Whorf differed over the extent to which language affects the way we think, their ideas are often discussed together, and are famously known as the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.” More recently, Lera Boroditsky and Alice Gaby have substantiated the hypothesis with empirical research, using the Pormpuraaw languages as an example to show that the structure of a language has a fundamental effect on its user’s sense of time and direction.⁵

Boroditsky further proposes that the use of language (in addition to its structure) influences people’s perception of reality as well as their attitudes towards a proposition. In a paper co-written with Paul Thibodeau in 2011, she shows that a difference of one word in a passage can affect how people react to the whole passage. In an experiment, they prepared two almost identical paragraphs that discussed the rising crime rate in a city. The only difference between them was a single word that metaphorically described the situation. Each participant was shown one of the two versions. The authors found that the two very similar passages could lead to very different attitudes: those who

3 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 10–11.

4 See Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1921); Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B Carroll (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956).

5 For example, English speakers write rightwards, hence the left is associated with the past, and the future with the right. In contrast, the Australian Aboriginal Pormpuraaw understand time as going from East to West. See Lera Boroditsky and Alice Gaby, “Remembrances of Times East,” *Psychological Science* 21, no. 11 (2010): 1635–1639.

read that crime was like a “beast” favored tougher punishments, while those who read that crime was like a “virus” preferred a more rehabilitative method to tackle the issue.⁶ All participants claimed that they came up with specific conclusions because of the statistics, but Thibodeau and Boroditsky argue that a single metaphorical noun can have a subtle but potent influence on people’s judgment.

Framing as a concept has been adopted in many disciplines. For instance, in the field of public opinion studies, scholars often talk about “framing effects,” a kind of cognitive bias that occurs “when a communication changes people’s attitudes toward an object by changing the relative weights they give to competing considerations about the object.”⁷

Different frames are also associated with different genres (e.g., advertisements, news reports, even menus). In literary studies, a frame story refers to the technique in which an introduction sets the tone for the subsequent narrative(s). This is one of the most common means for an author to contextualize the main story, position readers’ attitude to subsequent narratives, and engage readers’ interest by creating a narrative hook and filling information gaps readers might otherwise find problematic.

A frame story is often delivered in the form of a coherent narrative that invites readers to comprehend a proposition or an event in a certain way. This concept has likewise been utilized by clinical psychologists such as Kim Etherington and Shira Taube Dayan to help patients deal with trauma by using a positive and constructive point of view to gain a “new understanding of the world” and of “themselves and their lives.”⁸ Scientists and social scientists thereby debunk the idea of objective, unbiased analysis. Serena Pollastri et al. and Rafael Luna note that framing devices are frequently used to package scientific narratives as well as government projects to manipulate public opinion, change people’s attitudes, or overcome established views and prejudices.⁹

6 Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky, “Metaphors We Think with: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning,” *PLoS ONE* 6, no. 2 (2011): e16782.

7 Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, “Counterframing Effects,” *Journal of Politics* 75, no. 1 (2013): 2.

8 See Kim Etherington, *Trauma, Drug Misuse and Transforming Identities: A Life Story Approach* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2008), 32; see also Shira Taube Dayan, “The Benefits of Life Stories to Trauma Research: Child Disaster Studies through Ecological-Developmental Lenses,” *Children & Society* 36, no. 4 (2021): 564–578.

9 See Serena Pollastri et al., “Envisioning Urban Futures: From Narratives to Composites,” *The Design Journal* 20 (2017): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352933>; Rafael E. Luna, “The Art of Scientific Storytelling: Framing Stories to Get Where You Want to Go,” *Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology* 21, no. 11 (2020): 653–654.

Given that Hong Kong's international reputation was adversely affected by recent political and pandemic policies, John Lee 李家超, the current Chief Executive of Hong Kong, vowed to make changes by telling the world good stories about Hong Kong.¹⁰ On multiple occasions, he emphasized that the "good stories of Hong Kong" had to be told (說好香港故事). For example, when giving a speech to young people at the "21st Century Cup" National English-Speaking Competition (Hong Kong Region) Awards Ceremony in 2022, Lee offered this directive: "To you and to all our proficient speakers, I have just one demand: whenever you can, do tell a good Hong Kong story, and a good story of 'one country, two systems' to the world. It is paramount for the global community to know our achievements and unique advantages for us to continue to shine as the Pearl of the Orient."¹¹ This idea dovetails with the efforts of Hong Kong Chronicles Institute (HKCI 香港地方志中心) founded by Our Hong Kong Foundation (香港基金), a non-governmental organization, in August 2019. HKCI is chaired by former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa 董建華 and has launched a major pro-establishment project entitled *Hong Kong Chronicles* (香港志)—a book series not to be confused with the blocked website *HKChronicles* (香港編年史) which was active in 2019–2021—to tell the social and cultural history of Hong Kong.¹² According to the official website, these local chronicles are "comprehensive records rigorously compiled with hundreds of years of government and non-government information as well as oral history interviews." The principle of objectivity makes this source different from history books in the sense that these chronicles only "recount" and do not "interpret" historical information.¹³ Nevertheless, Goffman may disagree with the differentiation between recounting and interpreting because the act of recounting already involves the use of (subjective) frames, impacting readers' organization of experience and interpretation.

John Lee and his team have not explicitly spelled out the nature of "good Hong Kong stories." However, he has mentioned key terms such as "One

10 "Speech by CE at 21st Century Cup National English Speaking Competition Hong Kong Region Awards Ceremony 2022," Press Releases, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, August 21, 2022, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202208/21/P2022082100523.htm>.

11 See John Lee, "Tell the World a Good HK Story: CE," Admin & Civic Affairs, News.gov.hk, August 21, 2022, https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2022/08/20220821/20220821_165804_475.html.

12 See Bo Wang, Lingcha Wei, and Anqi Yang, eds., *Hong Kong Chronicles: Overview & Chronology* (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co. Ltd, 2022).

13 "Master Project Plan: 2019–2027," Hong Kong Chronicles Institute, September 2022, <https://www.hkchronicles.org.hk/en/masterProject.php>.

Country, Two Systems (一國兩制),” “Think Business, Think Hong Kong (成就機遇，首選香港),” and “The city is a good place where people can make their dreams come true (香港是讓人實現夢想的好地方).”¹⁴ The motif of “good Hong Kong stories” is one-dimensional, emphasizing positivity and praise. Interestingly, Lee and his team of pro-government commentators also dwell on the importance of “truth” and “authenticity,” hinting that alternative exposé or darker narratives about Hong Kong can be “scaremongering remarks.”¹⁵ Tim Hamlett observes that the authorities are working to minimize all the bad news in a polarized Hong Kong.¹⁶ By way of (over)compensation, the government works hard to create good Hong Kong stories.

2 Background: Historical Events of 2019

In June 2019, the Hong Kong government, led by then Chief Executive Carrie Lam 林鄭月娥, proposed an extradition bill that would change fugitive laws, allowing the government to consider extradition requests on a case-by-case basis from any country, including those with no extradition agreement with Hong Kong (such as Mainland China, Taiwan, and Macau). For example, Hong-kongers wanted for crimes in Mainland China or Taiwan may be extradited to stand trial in China or Taiwan. To appease the business community, tax evasion and several commercial offenses were not considered extraditable offenses. However, politicians, especially those in the pro-democracy camp, raised concerns and protested because this bill could compromise Hong Kong’s judicial autonomy within the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. Hong Kong people, who generally did not trust the legal system of Mainland China, were also worried that if the bill was introduced, anyone living in Hong Kong could be extradited to the Mainland if he or she was deemed a political threat to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

On 9 June 2019, around one million people participated in a peaceful protest launched by the Civil Human Rights Front. However, the government insisted

14 “Strategies to Tell HK’s Good Stories,” News.gov.hk, October 19, 2022, https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2022/10/20221019/20221019_093105_345.html.

15 “HKSAR Government strongly disapproves and condemns scaremongering remarks by US Consul General to Hong Kong,” Press Releases, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, March 1, 2024, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202403/01/P2024030100864.htm>.

16 Tim Hamlett, “You Want ‘Good’ Hong Kong Stories? Do Something about the Bad Ones,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, 27 August 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/08/27/you-want-good-hong-kong-stories-do-something-about-the-bad-ones>.

on the second reading of the bill, which led to the siege of the Legislative Council on June 12. The government declared this to be a “riot,” and the protestors were met with a police action many considered excessive. On June 15, Carrie Lam announced that she would suspend the bill but would not comment on whether she would withdraw it. This announcement, in addition to the suicide of an individual in protest against the bill and the government’s refusal to set up an independent commission to investigate whether police had used excessive force during the protests, led to another massive protest on June 16, with two million people taking part.

Another protest took place on July 1, with around 260,000 people participating. Though this protest was largely peaceful at the beginning, a group of radical protestors stormed the Hong Kong Legislative Council in the evening. This marked the beginning of more radical protests, leading to strikes as well as violent clashes between protestors and police in the subsequent months. Hong Kong people were generally divided into two camps: Team Blue Ribbon rooted for the government and the “thin blue line,” and Team Yellow Ribbon rooted for democracy and rejected the extradition bill. These two camps grew further apart in terms of their political opinions over the extradition bill as well as Hong Kong’s governance under Chinese sovereignty.

The great divide between the two camps could be observed before the political upheavals of 2019. Kam C. Wong studied the 2016 Mongkok Civil Unrest and pointed out how people of different political orientations would not only see the event differently but also name it in different ways. The same incident could be a “police-citizen conflict (警民衝突)” to some and a “public disorder (公眾秩序混亂),” a “disturbance (騷亂),” or a “riot (暴動)” to others. People’s response depended hugely on their political compass.¹⁷ Given the increased polarization of Hong Kong society over the last few years, people have diverse views of how they see Hong Kong as a community as well as its history.

3 Case Study: Storifying 2019 in the *Hong Kong Our Home Concert*

In the midst of the 2019 political instability, the Hong Kong government aimed to promote a unified narrative, rebuild the city’s reputation, and foster a sense of solidarity among residents. One such narrative can be seen in a show produced by Television Broadcasts Ltd. (TVB).

¹⁷ Kam C. Wong, *Public Order Policing in Hong Kong: The Mongkok Riot* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 41.

TVB is Hong Kong's largest television company. Since the late 2000s, as discussed by Leung, it has become increasingly pro-government, particularly after receiving significant funding from Chinese companies.¹⁸ During the 2019 social unrest in Hong Kong, TVB's news department reported on several incidents with an apparent pro-government bias. This perceived bias earned the company the derogatory nickname "CCTVB"—a portmanteau combining China Central Television (CCTV—the national television broadcaster owned and controlled by the Chinese Communist Party) and TVB.¹⁹

From 8:00 to 11:00 pm on 14 September 2019, TVB Jade (the most popular free-to-air TV channel) broadcasted a primetime variety and entertainment show entitled *Hong Kong Our Home Concert* to showcase the city's positive image. The show highlighted variety entertainment ranging from various singers' performances of well-known Cantopop songs from the 1980s and participation in games to artists' casual conversations with program hosts.²⁰ True to the format of a variety show, one segment featured charity visits in which local celebrities graced an elderly nursing home and entertained the residents. Additionally, the show advertised special offers from restaurants, hotels, shops, and products and services even though the rolling credits mentioned only three official sponsors. The Communications Authority later received 16 public complaints about the excessive inclusion of indirect advertising materials (the special offers) and direct advertising (the sponsored products), amounting to "direct encouragement of purchase of the products or services concerned." The Communications Authority ruled that TVB "was in breach of paragraph 2A(a) of Chapter 9 of the TV Advertising Code" but that the broadcaster also "largely complied with the relaxed regulatory regime." Thus, TVB was merely advised to "observe more closely the relevant provision of the TV Advertising Code."²¹

For the purpose of this study, I focus on the show's opening. In the "Appendix Case," the Communications Authority described the opening in this way: "The programme started with the voice-over that Hong Kong was experiencing hardship and a business downturn. It was followed by interviews with people from the union and association of different professions on the difficulties

18 Kai-Chi Leung, *Xianggang diyike* 香港第一課 [The First Lessons on Hong Kong] (Taipei: SpringHill Publishing, 2020), 313.

19 Ibid., 308–316.

20 The show included performances of Cantopop songs such as "Red Sun (紅日)," "Best Wishes (祝福)," and "Ambitions Under the Sun (壯志驕陽)."

21 Communications Authority, "Appendix Case—Television Programme 'Hong Kong Our Home Concert' Broadcast from 8:00 pm to 11:00 pm on 14 September 2019 on the Jade Channel of Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB)," July 21, 2020, 1–7, 9. https://www.coms-auth.hk/filemanager/en/content_713/appx_20200721.pdf.

encountered by [these] professions.”²² An excerpt of the opening monologue is as follows:

Hong Kong is now facing an unprecedented difficult period. Its economy is badly set back, and various industries are suffering from depression. Every family in Hong Kong is affected, but this is not the Hong Kong we are familiar with. Hong Kong can become the metropolis it is today due to the fact that Hongkongers have worked hard to create opportunities for themselves. Even though we have been faced with difficulties and setbacks, with our hard work and perseverance, we will be able to overcome these. Even though we are now faced with another adversity, we believe that we can rise to the challenge, live happily again, and make this Pearl of the East shine and sparkle again.²³

This voice-over narration is a framing device to tell a Hong Kong story. It talks about how the city became a success because people are good at resilient recovery and overcoming setbacks. To reinforce this message, when the narrator mentions how Hongkongers work hard and create opportunities for themselves, the screen displays a montage of different working-class citizens—all middle-aged or older—devoting themselves to hard work (see Figure 4.1).

The content is constructed to highlight that the 2019 situation was an economic setback that impacted families, employment, and livelihood, hence Hongkongers must strive to emerge stronger from the turmoil. The monologue “recounts” the Hong Kong situation, but the images serve the Communist propaganda by positioning working people as “city builders” and ordinary people as “pillars of society.” Hong Kong may be a “capitalist paradise” (to use the words of Jon Woronoff),²⁴ but the narrative spotlights the successful contribution and importance of low-income groups.

On a different note, after analyzing more than 1,300 narratives, Andrew Reagon and his colleagues identified six basic story frames, one of which highlights

22 Ibid.

23 This is my translation. The original version delivered in Cantonese is as follows. 香港正在經歷一段史無前例的艱難歲月，經濟重挫，百業蕭條 ... 香港每一個家庭都受影響，但這個不是我們熟悉的香港。香港能夠成為今天的國際大都會，全憑香港人多年來不斷努力去開創，即使曾經遇過不少困難和挫折，憑我們的努力和毅力，一定可以渡過難關。雖然香港再一次面對逆境，但相信我們一定可以迎難而上，再開開心心地生活，令我們這顆東方之珠會更發光發亮。

24 See Jon Woronoff, *Hong Kong, Capitalist Paradise* (New Hampshire: Heinemann Asia, 1980).



FIGURE 4.1 A montage sequence is combined with the voiceover monologue

the attractive prototype of the “rags-to-riches” frame.²⁵ When the frame is further developed, Brené Brown notes that a rags-to-riches story typically consists of three acts:²⁶

Act 1: The protagonist is called to adventure and accepts the adventure. The rules of the world are established, and the end of Act 1 is the “inciting incident.”

Act 2: The protagonist looks for every comfortable way to solve the problem. By the climax, he learns what it’s really going to take to solve the problem. This act includes the “lowest of the low.”

Act 3: The protagonist needs to prove she’s learned the lesson, usually showing a willingness to prove this at all costs. This is all about redemption—an enlightened character knowing what to do to resolve a conflict.²⁷

Brown’s three-act scenario emphasizes these elements: conflicts, solution, and redemption. In that sense, the TVB narrative implies that Hong Kong is a rags-to-riches society. People may have had humble beginnings and be suffering

25 Andrew J. Reagan et al., “The Emotional Arcs of Stories Are Dominated by Six Basic Shapes,” *EPJ Data Science* 5, no. 31 (2016): 1–12.

26 See Brené Brown, *Rising Strong* (New York: Random House, 2017).

27 *Ibid.*, 30.

hardships, but there will be success in spite of minor setbacks. The general trend is upward.

My research questions are centered on the question of audience reception. To what extent does this frame and content resonate with Hongkongers? Can this narrative produce a positive impression and heal a city marked by division and partisanship? When analyzing the methods and structure of storytelling, Will Storr emphasizes the importance of characters (and especially character flaws).²⁸ All narratives have characters, and instead of paying careful attention to the plot, good writers should focus on building convincing characters and putting them in well-thought-out situations. The art of (tv) storytelling requires not only good editing techniques but also skillful representation of characters.

Storr's method obliges us to ask what characters are singled out in *Hong Kong Our Home Concert*. The obvious answer to this question is Hongkongers: it was Hongkongers who overcame the setbacks and turned the city into a metropolis. It is Hongkongers who face difficulties and whom the screenwriter aims to encourage and rally behind. However, we should note that the "Hongkongers" in the show may not be the average Hongkonger in society. The anonymous narrator offers a generalized picture: Hongkongers are those who worked hard to build up Hong Kong and overcome hurdles; at the same time, the screen displays only workers that are middle-aged or older. When the narrator references Hongkongers, this seems to only mean not-so-young Hongkongers. This is very much consistent with the general opinion that the pro-government camp comprises mostly mature politicians and citizens with strong working-class sympathies and stronger ties to Mainland China. In contrast, young people are absent characters. In pro-Beijing news channels, young people are often presented as the cause of troubles, so young people's absence in this narration may hint at this "Us vs Them" mentality.

Indeed, the pro-democracy and pro-government camps offer different explanations for what caused political instability. On the one hand, the pro-democracy camp says that the Hong Kong and Beijing governments compromise justice and are therefore causing the upheaval. On the other hand, the pro-government camp points the finger at young people, accusing them of being influenced by foreign powers that aimed to hinder the development of China and of Hong Kong. However, it is not my intention to verify the authenticity of these claims. My goal is to signal how tv storytelling can reinforce political alignment. The pro-establishment camp is dominated by mature

28 See Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling: Why Stories Make Us Human and How to Tell Them Better* (London: HarperCollins, 2019), chapter 2.

politicians with conservative sentiments, and the show implicitly reinforces the idea that mature working citizens are builders of Hong Kong, bringing stability and prosperity.

The constructed binaries (mature/young, worker/disrupter, prosperity/hardship) may seem neat, but it cannot fully represent the nuanced political orientations of Hong Kong people. This narrative aligns with the opinions of Team Blue Ribbon given how their adherents often fail to understand why young people become radical troublemakers, causing disruption to Hong Kong society. The show can also help not-so-young (and often, pro-government) Hongkongers to make sense of the situation and shore up their political stance (given how they are depicted as “good people” in this scenario).

At the same time, the show may alienate younger people, who remain invisible and excluded from the narrative. If a good Hong Kong story can hypothetically make the “Pearl of the Orient (東方之珠)” shine again, I work to collect suitable data to examine, first, how young persons respond to this kind of constructed narrative; and second, whether this Hong Kong story can serve the purpose of enhancing people’s good opinion of the city.

4 Method

To achieve the above goals, I conducted a series of interviews with individuals under-represented in the variety show, namely a small group of Hongkongers who self-identify as “Yellow Ribbons.” Between 25 March and 10 April 2022, I interviewed eight individuals in an online social group on Discord, an instant messaging social platform utilizing a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), in which participants on the same server could engage in real-time chat with one another, in addition to exchanging messages through text. These participants were aged between 19 and 25; they were online friends who joined a themed server set up in April 2021, noting that the server became the platform for them to discuss their pro-democratic political views and offer mutual social support to one another. After I joined the server a month later and interacted with them occasionally, I came to understand that most of them had participated in various 2019 anti-extradition bill protests. Two of them had been arrested during the protests, and one claimed he had experienced police brutality during his arrest.

The interviews were conducted via text messaging and voice chat. To avoid cognitive bias, I purposefully showed the participants only the transcribed narrative and not the images. In each interview, I presented the aforementioned TV narrative to the participants, and asked them two questions: (1) Does this

story accurately depict the story of Hong Kong? and (2) What is/are the reason(s) for your answer? The participants were asked to respond in writing. The questions were in both English and Chinese, and my transcription was in traditional Chinese. Participants could choose to answer in either language. If their responses warranted more information, I asked for further explanation or clarification either in writing via text messaging or in speech via voice chat. (For the sake of consistency, I translated non-English responses into English.) The two questions were designed to elicit young people's attitudes towards the constructed narrative. Using the interpretative method, participants can provide responses to a frame narrative, allowing us to gauge what is and what is not a good Hong Kong story.

5 Results

Seven out of eight participants did not think that the selected narrative accurately depicted Hong Kong. Below is Participant A's response, which was written in English:

This passage does not depict Hong Kong accurately because the situation in HK has changed drastically since 2019. It is no longer a place that can pride itself on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Presses like *Apple Daily* and *Stand News* are forced to shut down due to their political stance and many people are arrested and jailed for participating in the 2019 protests. Speeches that are against the government or the CCP are censored by the National Security Law and HK people are left with no freedom of expression other than engaging in escapism with meaningless entertainment. While there is no denying that the past generations have contributed to the economic success of HK, they have failed to safeguard ... the full implementation of the One Country Two Systems, making way for more interference from the CCP. As the HK economy is struck by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government intensifies its control and surveillance over HK people in the name of public health. People are tracked with the LeaveHomeSafe app²⁹ and those who are not vaccinated are barred from entering any public places. The government continues to update and seek more information from people through the app,

29 The LeaveHomeSafe app was a mandatory contact tracing app introduced by the Hong Kong Government in 2020 as part of its efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. All residents and visitors aged 16 and above were required to use the app when entering specified premises like restaurants, shopping malls, and government buildings.

creating a public concern over how personal data is used and processed. HK's success is not based solely on the economy but also on its rule of law and the freedom of speech. As more innocent people are being prosecuted under the National Security Law, people are scared to express their opinions. Freedom of press, speech and expression is lost completely. The political situation has since changed for the worse and there is no way for HK to go back to the way it used to be even when the economy thrives again.

Importantly, Participant A did not agree with the view that the 2019 situation was “an unprecedented difficult period” solely due to economic hardship. Instead, she linked the difficult situation to a political cause: Hongkongers were “left with no freedom of expression other than escapism with meaningless entertainment.” Given her different interpretation, it is not surprising that she arrived at a different conclusion. Instead of thinking that Hongkongers can “rise to the challenge” and make “this Pearl of the East shine and sparkle again,” she saw that “there is no way for H[ong] K[ong] to go back to the way it used to be even when the economy thrives again.” In short, this kind of partial narrative promoted by the TV show seems to have the effect of heightening her skepticism and pessimism.

Participant B (writing his response in written Cantonese) shared a similar view:

I disagree with the story because Hongkongers are no longer united and they do not want to contribute to a city that was forcibly taken from them. I would describe Hong Kong as a defeated place. People with good ability leave the city because they have lost confidence in the city and are angry towards the authorities. Many who decide to stay in Hong Kong do not want to better the community. Some just want to make money here; some want to witness history; and some have no means to leave. Hong Kong will not return to its previous state, and it cannot face the challenges like it once did.

Similarly, Participant B's response revealed skepticism—but for a different reason. Hong Kong was facing difficulties due to an intensified sense of disunity and dispossession because the city was taken from them. This view led him to come to another conclusion: “Hong Kong [will] not return to its previous state” due to mass migration, brain drain, and loss of morale.

Many participants do not buy the positive message contained in the selected narrative for various reasons. Participants C, D, and E, who all submitted their response in written Chinese, mentioned leadership and accountability.

Participant C: I believe that Hong Kong has fallen into this dire situation because of what the government has done. The current government is very different from its predecessors and could not assist Hongkongers in tackling problems.

Participant D: Under the control of the CCP, freedom is deteriorating, and those who are capable of leaving the city have chosen to emigrate. For this reason, the Pearl of the East can hardly shine again.

Participant E: ... the problem that Hong Kong faces is the collapse of the political system. The current government listens only to the CCP and not to Hongkongers. For this reason, Hongkongers cannot unite their efforts, and Hong Kong is losing its status as an international city, and it has lost its value as the springboard between China and the world.

On a different note, Participants F and G (responding in written Chinese) disputed the idea that 2019 was an “unprecedented” difficult period.

Participant F: Hong Kong is not facing the most difficult situation. It was more difficult during 2003.

Participant G: I think that [the incident in] 2003 was the most difficult situation Hongkongers had to face. When medical science was not enough to tackle the [SARS] virus, Hong Kong saw the highest number of people dying from the pandemic. I believe that that period was one of the darkest periods for Hong Kong.

Both participants claimed that the 2003 SARS pandemic was a more difficult period when compared to the 2019 situation. This is particularly interesting because people tend to emphasize their current distressed situation (in comparison to distant events, whether geographical or temporal). However, at the time of the interview in 2022, Participants F and G were 19 and 24 years old, respectively, meaning that one was a newborn and the other around five years old in 2003. Despite their lack of personal experience, they came to the view that the 2019 social unrest was not as bad as the SARS epidemic. One of them provided an objective assessment: the number of deaths was why he thought the 2003 pandemic was worse. Thus these participants could not agree with the content provided by the narrative and questioned the message embedded in the story.

Participant H (whose response was in written Cantonese) was the only one who thought the narrative offered an accurate depiction. She gave the following explanation:

Hong Kong was originally merely a fishing village, and it developed into an international financial center. The process involved many Hongkongers' hard work. Before the handover, businesses flourished, and the economy grew. Government policies were aptly applied to solve societal problems, and the community blossomed. However, after the handover, Hong Kong's development stalled (e.g., [lack of] growth in creative industries and the economy relied on only a few industries). The CCP has also meddled with the Hong Kong government. Additionally, after 1997, Hong Kong suffered from the SARS pandemic, the economic tsunami, the backsliding of democracy, and the COVID pandemic. These have brought Hong Kong from one plight after another. The last part of the narrative gives people hope and encourages them to believe that hard work can lead them out of difficulties and can bring about positive changes. I believe Hong Kong people hope to re-establish their glorious past or surpass their achievements. This idea is reasonable, and for this reason I believe this text has accurately told the Hong Kong story.

Participant H concluded that the story accurately depicted Hong Kong because it uses the "rags to riches" frame, and she wants to see this vision come true. In terms of content, she agreed that Hong Kong had become a metropolis due to Hongkongers' hard work but disagreed with the view that Hong Kong's problems are solely related to economic setbacks. She highlighted many factors, including CCP interference with the Hong Kong government and the COVID situation. At the end, Participant H endorsed this narrative because she found the frame positive and uplifting: Hong Kong can be great again. In this case, instead of a wholesale acceptance of the message being presented, people can separate the content from the frame and select the preferred elements to suit their personal view and stance.

6 Discussion: Propaganda or Agency

This (albeit limited) study invites us to examine the power of media propaganda as well as individual agency. The basic tenet of propaganda is that a propagandist's sophisticated use of language and framing devices can sideline facts and

reality. People are predictably gullible and will be mobilized or manipulated by propagandistic messages. Propaganda has existed since the time of Socrates and Aristotle, and the impact of the Sophists on ancient Greek politics was a case in point. Language and frames can guide a discourse in particular ways so that sophists or propagandists can appeal to people's emotions rather than reason. In fact, propaganda can influence both emotion and reason, and this is shown in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.³⁰ In his narrative, Orwell warns us that language (e.g., doublethink) can be turned into a potent weapon to cancel individual thought and control public opinion. As mentioned above, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis supports this view, noting that language affects human thought. Goffman's concept of framing also emphasizes that selection of words, punctuation marks, images, and stereotypes can enable the comprehension or production of reality.³¹

The influence of propaganda on the human mind is widely recognized, explored, and discussed by psychologists, sociologists, and linguists alike. In their work *The Meaning of Meaning*, Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards argue that propaganda is common in modern times. "In the twentieth century, the intensification of militant nationalism has added a further 'good reason' to popularize propaganda, and 'in war-time, words become a normal part of the mechanism of deceit.'"³² In the post-wwii era, the CCP has been using propaganda as one of its tools of governance. As Gao points out, one major lesson Mao Zedong learned from Stalin was the importance of the power conferred by different interpretations of words. Consequently, the "CCP Central Committee used the superiority of its cadres to establish an ideological propaganda" and help perpetuate its authoritarian regime.³³ In the 1990s, led by Norman Fairclough, critical discourse analysts aimed to unveil power relations hidden in texts and uncover hegemonic structures within it.³⁴ While Fairclough and his colleagues provide this theoretical framework to help debunk the rhetoric, propaganda, frame, and power dynamics in a given discourse, the framework

30 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Books, 1949/2008).

31 Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*, 20.

32 Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism. Supplementary Essays by B. Malinowski and F.G. Crookshank* (New York: Harcourt, 1923), 17.

33 Hua Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origins and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930–1945*, trans. Stacy Mosher and Jian Guo (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2018), 85.

34 See Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 1989); Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

also assumes that (lay)people are often nothing more than passive receivers of information.

However, despite the immense influence propaganda has on the human mind, humans do have agency with which to challenge propaganda that creates cognitive dissonance. John Joseph argues that critical discourse analysis assumes that “all real interpretation of utterances is determined by the utterances themselves, and, which logically follows from this, that supposedly free peoples are in false consciousness, being actually in the thrall of malevolent governmental and corporate forces that, through language, conspire to manufacture consent.”³⁵ He points out that people often overlook “the belief that human beings really are agents who make choices that, while certainly bound up with the context in which they live, and no doubt conditioned by their personal histories, are nevertheless ‘free’ in the crucial sense that they are aware of more than one option being open to them, do not all select the same option ... and can usually articulate why exactly they have made the choices they’ve made.”³⁶

It is true that propaganda can frame a person or a situation in specific ways and create new discourse to change the minds of individuals. However, we should not ignore the fact that, as Joseph emphasizes, people have free will and can choose to reject the propagandistic content or accept the frame that comes with it. If new information does not agree with their outlook, people are free to choose whether to welcome the propagandistic information or further strengthen their existing belief. Thus, the power of propaganda can be limited. Joseph uses the broccoli analogy to support his point. Broccoli is not a very popular vegetable (especially among children). Given that many governments want to promote healthy food among their citizens, why do we not see broccoli advertisements everywhere? Instead, we only see advertisements for junk food, including over-sugared cereals and grease-burgers. Joseph’s answer to this question is simple: people have their innate preferences, and government propaganda may not change much. No matter how aggressive the promotional campaign may be, the increase in “broccoli sales would not in fact pay the cost of the advertising.”³⁷

This is exactly what this study has shown. In the midst of the 2019 social unrest, the most popular free-to-air channel—TVB Jade—put forward a show to encourage local citizens to see Hong Kong positively. The rag-to-riches frame appealed to people’s collective unconscious, but the content was

35 John E. Joseph, *Language and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 136.

36 Ibid., 137.

37 Ibid., 141.

carefully crafted to emphasize only economic setbacks. The narrative also subtly excluded young Hongkongers and did not spotlight their contribution to Hong Kong society.

Interestingly, while the narrative excluded young people, the younger generation questioned the accuracy of the show's Hong Kong story. These pro-democracy participants, all below the age of 25, were not impressed by the message. They not only debated the premise of the story (that is, whether the current situation is the most difficult period Hong Kong has experienced), but also pondered on its projection (that is, Hong Kong can return to its previous glory). Most importantly, they queried the focus on economic setbacks without mentioning other factors such as leadership, governmental accountability, and political changes. To them, the setback is not primarily economic but democratic. This shows that participants are able to exercise agency and rate this narrative critically. In the end, this short narrative may not have much impact on their existing outlook.

Given the context of Hong Kong over the past few years, it is not at all surprising. As Ho Ming-sho 何明修 points out, the crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong in 2019 has instilled a sense of desperation and urgency in a population that is typically politically apathetic, especially among young people who were born and raised in a democratic environment. This urgency has fueled their energy and motivation to engage in or at least support the political struggle.³⁸ Against this backdrop, it is understandable why young people and democracy supporters reject the narrative that frames the unrest as merely an economic setback to overcome. Even if the story in question is judiciously framed to encourage Hongkongers to persevere through this difficulty, they reject being labeled as those "Hongkongers" who solely yearn for economic stability.

It is important to note that, pro-democracy people do not reject the rags-to-riches aspect of the Hong Kong story. In fact, they agree with that part of the narrative. For instance, in a photobook documenting the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests, the authors introduce the book by recounting the history of Hong Kong:³⁹

38 Ming-Sho Ho 何明修, *Weishenme yaozhanling jietou? Congtaiyanghua, yusan, dao fan-songZhong yundong* 為什麼要佔領街頭？從太陽花、雨傘，到反送中運動 [*Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven: Taiwan's Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement*] (New Taipei City: Alluvius Books Ltd., 2019), 259–264.

39 22 Hongkongers, *Ziyou liuyue: 2019nian, Xianggang fan songZhong yuziyou yundong de kaiduan* 自由6月：2019年香港「反送中」與自由運動的開端 [*Freedom June: The Beginning of Hong Kong's 2019 Anti-Extradition and Freedom Movement*] (Taipei: Xinrui wenchuang, 2019), 6.

Since 1942, under various circumstances, Hong Kong has developed into a global center of economy and trade. In the 20th century, the affluence of Hong Kong society has empowered its citizens to hold their heads high on the global stage. Hong Kong's experience as a British colony was very different from that of other colonies in the 20th century. Political stability and economic prosperity allowed ordinary citizens to live with dignity and hope.⁴⁰

Similar to the Hong Kong story portrayed in the TVB show, the authors here highlight Hong Kong's development into a global center. However, unlike the TVB narrative, the contributions of the people who developed the city are not emphasized; they are instead grouped into "various circumstances". Additionally, this narrative underscores "political stability" as a key factor enabling "citizens to live with dignity and hope", a point completely ignored in the TVB version.

While comparing these two narratives warrants further academic discussion, the main point here is that the rags-to-riches frame is not contested by people with very different perspectives. The pro-democracy camp does not reject this narrative. Instead, as indicated by the textual data and as well as the analysis shown above, young people mostly disagree on the factors contributing to Hong Kong's success, the causes of recent political instability, and whether Hong Kong people desire economic stability over democracy.

7 Conclusion

In all fairness, many governments East and West use language, commercials, films, and digital media outlets to promote pro-establishment views with the aim of persuading individuals and swaying public opinion. The Hong Kong government's recent effort to "tell the good stories of Hong Kong" is no exception.⁴¹ Government officials hope that by (re)framing the history of Hong Kong in a certain way, people can be made to perceive the past differently and consequently alter their attitude towards the city and their government. However,

40 The original text is written in Chinese: 自1942年以來，香港在各種因緣際遇下發展成為世界經濟與貿易的中心，二十世紀香港的富裕程度足以令港人傲視全球。香港作為英國殖民地的經驗與二十世紀其他的殖民地差別甚大，政治穩定與經濟繁榮年普遍市民得以具尊嚴及希望地生活。

41 "Speech by CE at 21st Century Cup National English-Speaking Competition Hong Kong Region Awards Ceremony 2022."

this study shows that propaganda may not totally cancel human agency. The human mind is not a blank slate, and most humans are not passive receivers of information. As noted by Joseph, people possess agency, and while they may be bound by their situation and personal history, they are free to choose whether they agree with the content of political communications and accept the frame in which they are presented.⁴²

In other words, politicians and authorities may frame whatever stories and produce and disseminate whatever propagandistic content they see fit. In the end, people can choose to accept or question these stories. This study shows that people with strong inner convictions may not be easily swayed, as in this case, where young pro-democracy Hongkongers question propagandistic frames, content, or predictions.

A final note is that, even though these interviews were conducted in 2022 (almost three years after the show was broadcast), young people remained frustrated in Hong Kong. This is because instead of trying to resolve the differences between the pro-democratic camp and the pro-Beijing camp in the post-2019 era, the Hong Kong government continues to clamp down on the freedoms of its citizens by prosecuting news media companies seen as pro-democracy, forcing the closure of pro-democracy unions, and prosecuting protestors for rioting and demonstrating. Framed by this “Us vs Them” mentality, the government in fact perpetuated social polarization and increased frustration among the “Yellow Ribbons.” It remains to be seen whether and how the 50% increase in TV programming quota of young persons will impact society positively. We all love a good story, but it may require more than TV producers to make the Hong Kong story a good one.

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De-territorialization and Re-territorialization: the “Cramped Space” in Contemporary Hong Kong Literature

Shun Man Emily Chow-Quesada

1 Introduction

This chapter foregrounds the new aesthetics in contemporary Hong Kong literature as I examine Florence Ng's 吳智欣 *Wild Boar in Victoria Harbour* (維多利亞港的野豬, 2019), Dorothy Tse's 謝曉虹 *Ghosts with no Umbrella* (無遮鬼, 2021), and Ching Hang Wong's 王証恒 *Lorries Returning from the South* (南歸貨車, 2021), through the lens of “the cramped space” proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986).

When British colonial rule came to an end, Ackbar Abbas (1997) argued that Hong Kong was a distinctive postcolonial space because it had no pre-colonial past. It was “a cultural space” of “disappearance.” However, Hong Kong not only failed to disappear but also made persistent attempts to search for a strong integrative cultural identity. In light of Hong Kong's changing demographic and cultural space, I argue that the process of de/re-territorialization is likewise taking place in the literary space. Ng's poetry collection highlights Hongkongers' creativity and diverse linguistic codes in mixing written English, Chinese, and Cantonese with “Cantonglish” (港式英語). Tse's collection of magic realist stories represents a transformative city and transformed citizenship. Wong's short stories showcase the critical reflectivity of the marginalized, working class subjects. In my view, these writers strive to conceptualize a “minor literature” in a postcolonial cramped space so that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “minoritarian” people can emerge and (re-)invent themselves.¹ This is a creative act of becoming that emphasizes de/re-territorialization and goes beyond the articulation of a well-defined, majoritarian discourse.

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana B. Polan, and Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 48.

In 1968, Richard Hughes published *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time: Hong Kong and Its Many Faces* to imply that Hongkongers were borrowed people.² Hughes unfolds a history of Hong Kong and includes a subtle foreshadowing of 1997 as the end of its time as a British colony. Unlike Steve Tsang's *A Modern History of Hong Kong* or John Carroll's *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, it is not an academic book.³ However, the book vividly captures the transience of the city.⁴ On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China. In 2022, Hong Kong celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its return to mainland China and proudly defines itself as a unique postcolonial space in the world.⁵ The "One Country, Two Systems" framework exemplifies a remarkable integration of distinct legal and economic systems, fostering both unity and diversity while allowing for the preservation of unique cultural identities within a harmonious national context.

Ackbar Abbas famously argues that Hong Kong is a distinctive postcolonial space because of its obscure pre-colonial past and of the "cultural space" of "disappearance".⁶ Yet Hongkongers witnessed the rise of cramped spaces in the post-colonial era, which triggered new attempts to search for a sense of identity. In the post-millennial epoch, Hong Kong has transformed into a "cramped space" as an influx of migrants and workers from mainland China and South-east Asia, coupled with significant cultural shifts, social changes, and a persistent housing crisis, has intensified competition for limited resources, living space, and cultural dominance.

As various cultures undergo processes of deterritorialization in their quest to assert themselves and be heard, local writers are motivated to reterritorialize their narratives and perspectives within the literary landscape. On the

2 Richard Hughes published a revised edition of his work in 1976, which is read more widely. See Hughes, *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time: Hong Kong and Its Many Faces* (London: Deutsch, 1976).

3 See Steve Tsang's 曾銳生 *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London: Tauris, 2004); John Carroll's *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

4 By contrast, the "Pearl of the Orient" expression usually alludes to the beauty and charm of the city after the Taiwanese singer Lo Ta-yu 羅大佑 wrote a song of the same name in 1986, two years after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which affirmed the handover of the city to the Chinese government. See Lo Ta-yu, "*Dongfang zhi zhu* 東方之珠 [The Pearl of the Orient]" recorded in 1986, on *Revelation*, an EMI CD.

5 Macau's position is very similar to Hong Kong's in this respect. See Zhidong Hao 郝志東, *Macau History and Society* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

6 See Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 2.

linguistic front, writers such as Ng invite readers to look at the hybrid, (in)correct, and (im)proper language of local people. In addition, young writers such as Wong endeavor to uncover the marginalized life of underdogs in a wealthy society. In short, Hong Kong literature has become a cramped arena that favors a minor literature, showcasing innovative linguistic expressions and collective memories that reflect their distinct cultural backgrounds. In the process, writers welcome the breaking down of traditional boundaries, whether they are social, cultural, linguistic, or geographical. This cultural deterritorialization emphasizes diversity, fluidity, and the potential for new connections and relations to emerge.

Before the 1997 handover, Abbas suggested that Hong Kong was “not so much a place as a space of transit. It has always been, and will perhaps always be, a port in the most literal sense – a doorway, a point in between [...] Hong Kong will increasingly be at the intersections of different times or speeds.”⁷ Abbas clarifies that this sense of in-between-ness is much more complex than the narrative of East meeting West as he discusses the significance of migrancy in 2003. Migrancy does not only mean “changing places” but also “the nature of places.”⁸ According to Abbas, Hong Kong “has experienced both forms of migrancy,” including migration of “Shanghai industrialist families to Hong Kong after the communist revolution” that “formed the basis of the city’s industrial development” with “their capital and business expertise.” This also changed the nature of the city “through a series of mutations and reinventions.”⁹

Significantly, Abbas hints that when Hong Kong became “Xiang Gang, one of China’s Special Administrative Regions,” it was “changing daily,” which makes “the experience of migrancy ... inescapable.” Abbas argues that the 1997 handover was not simply “the moment of liberation from colonial rule” but also a “transition to a form of governance that has no clear historical precedents” because “history has seen to it that the Hong Kong Chinese are now culturally and politically quite distinct from mainlanders; two peoples separated by a common ethnicity.”¹⁰ Abbas writes that Hong Kong is changing “from reverse hallucination, which sees only desert, to a culture of disappearance, whose appearance is posited on the imminence of its disappearance.”¹¹ Abbas’s conceptualization of “disappearance” does not simply mean absence but should

7 Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 4.

8 Abbas, “Building Hong Kong: From Migrancy to Disappearance,” in *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*, ed. Stephen Cairns (London: Routledge, 2003), 129.

9 Ibid., 129.

10 Ibid., 129.

11 Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, 7.

be understood as consisting of three aspects: self-representation, replacement and substitution, and techniques of disappearance that respond to—without being absorbed by—a space of disappearance.¹² In short, this disappearance can take place in a “cramped” space when the once-dominant culture may become a residual presence, and emerging cultures struggle to establish themselves amidst a fluid state of transition, where identities and values are continuously reshaped and redefined.

2 Minor Literature and Hong Kong

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), Deleuze and Guattari argue that Franz Kafka’s Jewish writing in German denotes a way for the vaporized, othered people to express themselves in an othered language. Some have criticized the book for misappropriating Kafka as a minor writer and argue that the concept of *kleine Litteraturen* (lit. minor literatures) is founded on his “five-page diary entry on the literature of small nations.”¹³ However, the idea of minor literature has grown to become significant. Deleuze and Guattari start with the conceptualization of the postcolonial “cramped space.”¹⁴ In that “cramped space,” there exists “a missing people” in that the minority group lacks and refuses to acquire a coherent collective identity. “Minor literature” does not address a people that already exists but invents the consciousness of the missing people. Given that these people are under-represented or sidelined, writers can create and develop a world on behalf of minorities. Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not the task of addressing a people, which is already presupposed, but of contributing to the invention of a people. The moment the master or the colonizer proclaims, “there have never been people here,” the missing people are in a state of becoming. They invent themselves, in shanty towns, camps, and ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which art must contribute.

Deleuze and Guattari contextualized their theories in the postcolonial space, but to address the complex situation in Hong Kong, we need to expand the definition of the majority. Paul Haynes argues that the majority “assumes

¹² Ibid., 8.

¹³ See Stanley Corngold, “Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature,” *College Literature* 21.1 (1994): 89–101. Also see Lowell Edmunds, “Kafka on Minor Literature,” *German Studies Review* 33, no. 2 (2010): 351–374.

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 48.

a state of power and domination as the standard measure.”¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari also allude to this idea in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by arguing that “minorities are not necessarily defined by smallness of their number but rather by becoming or a line of fluctuation, in other words, by a gap that separates them from this or that axiom constituting a redundant majority.”¹⁶ In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, they clarify that “a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it, language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization.”¹⁷ The struggles of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari maintain, “express another possible community and forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility.”¹⁸

Deleuze and Guattari may have misinterpreted Kafka's original idea, but many applaud the concept of a minor literature. Einat Adar suggests that a minor writer is typically, “distanced from the centers of culture,” a situation often “compounded by their use of a second language.”¹⁹ They therefore “approach language from an underprivileged position, characterized by non-standard usage and an undependable linguistic toolkit for creating a meaningful or comprehensive representation.”²⁰ Grace V. S. Chin studied Bruneian women writers in English and argues that they signify “a hybridized identity and status” because they “represent the deterritorialized individual who symbolically occupies a liminal third space traverses two major language discourses—the local, national discourse of Brunei Malay (also the mother tongue and lingua franca for Bruneian Malays), and the global, or international, discourse of English.”²¹ She notes that these writings “collectively express another imagined community by positing an alternative viewpoint and voice that de-territorializes the established male-dominated, Malay-medium literary traditions in the MIB-regulated spaces of nation and society.”²² Similarly, Dalal Sarnou examined

15 Paul Haynes, “The Ethics and Aesthetics of Intertextual Writing: Cultural Appropriation and Minor Literature,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 61, no.3 (2021): 295.

16 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 469.

17 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 16.

18 Ibid., 17.

19 Ibid., 21.

20 Ibid.

21 Grace V. S. Chin, “Bruneian Women's Writing as an Emergent Minor Literature in English,” *World Englishes* 35, no. 4 (2016): 588. Chin phrases Brunei Malay as the lingua franca of Bruneian Malays because Malay may not be shared by all.

22 Ibid., 598. According to Chin, MIB stands for Malay Islamic Monarchy.

Arab Anglophone writings (women's writings in particular) and argues that they may be categorized as either minor or minority literature or both as their writings "are located at the meeting point of three minorities: Arabs, Muslims (taking into consideration that Arabs are Muslims and non-Muslims) and women."²³ Adar, Chin, and Sarnou all stress that minor literature is about the writer "finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois, his own third world, his own desert."²⁴ Regardless of how individualized that sounds, they emphasize that there are three driving characteristics in minor literature: "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation."²⁵

However, I argue that the situation in contemporary Hong Kong literature is more complex than the above-mentioned three characteristics. In the center of the minoritarian discourse is an ever-evolving memory, and existence eventually gives rise to new processes of de/re-territorialization, signaling an experimental "creative act of becoming."²⁶ This perspective resonates with critics such as Gregg Lambert, who writes that "the same conditions for a minor literature do not exist today as they might have fifty years ago, and then it seems only for a decade."²⁷ For example, Ng's multilingual poetry collection is not so much about the deterritorialization of language but about linguistic reterritorialization. Second, Tse's collection of novellas signifies an attempt to connect people via individual response in literary narratives. Third, Wong's short stories suggest a failed "collective assemblage of enunciation" when people struggle to resist their "underdog-ness."

3 *Wild Boar in Victoria Harbour: De/Re-Territorialization and a Linguistic Minoritarian Discourse*

Deleuze and Guattari argue that one of the features of minor literature is "the deterritorialization of language." However, I argue that Ng not only deterritorializes existing language but also re-territorializes different languages by

23 Dalal Sarnou, "Narratives of Arab Anglophone Women and the Articulation of a Major Discourse in a Minor Literature," *Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 16, no.1 (2014): 69.

24 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 18.

25 Ibid.

26 Constantine Verevis, "Minoritarian + Cinema," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 169.

27 Gregg Lambert, *The People Are Missing: Minor Literature Today* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 117.

juxtaposing them and interrogating the translatability of these languages. The point is to signal the disappearance of colloquial Hong Kong discourse in all forms of orthodox writings. Scholars have long noted Ng's interest in experimental language games. Polly Ho suggests that Ng's poems are "picture-telling poems" that can turn the "mundane" into "the first human ritual."²⁸ Ho also emphasizes Ng's multilingualism: "Florence first wrote the English poems and then translated them by herself [...] Florence plays with translation. When she translated the poems, she rewrote them. When she rewrote them, she made them better with her Chinese brush [...] The Chinese poems are the originals by themselves."²⁹

To begin with, it is important to understand the significance of the wild boar. Wild boars draw public attention because they are common in the countryside. However, as urban sprawl accelerates, wild boars are deemed intruders by Hongkongers. This perhaps explains why Ng deploys the wild boar as a motif in her collection, which is related to—if not inspired by—an incident in which a wild boar swam against all odds across the busy Victoria Harbour in 2018.³⁰ To many, wild boars embody resilience and adaptability, thriving in diverse environments while often symbolizing the instinct for survival.

Ng's opening poem, "Ode to the Wild Boar," captures this paradoxical essence. The motif of the wild boar recurs in the collection, and its presence hints at the de-territorialization of the existing spatial arrangement. The speaker calls out the wild boar that disrupts the cramped space of Victoria Harbour: "My call to you the outlaw who got your way to play in our water, in front of so many eyes, without paying taxes or having sweated your butt off for a job, / My wink at you the rogue who tusked down rules of traffic, burst through fences, skirted CCTV and mobile snapshots just to cool the bites of midges"

28 Polly Ho, "Introduction" to Florence Ng's *Wild Boar in Victoria Harbour* (Hong Kong: Kubrick, 2019), 5.

29 Ibid., 6–7.

30 See "Wild Boar Spotted Swimming in Victoria Harbour," *Asia Times*, March 14, 2018, <https://asiatimes.com/2018/03/wild-boar-spotted-swimming-victoria-harbour>; see also Ching Kong Ngai 倪清江, "Yezhu XiHuan youduhaiyong, chuanzhi xingjing shating ranglu 野豬西環游渡海泳，船隻行經煞停讓路 [Wild Boar Swimming Across the Harbour at Sai Wan Ships Stopped to Make Way]," *HK 01*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.hk01.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/167961/%E6%9C%89%E5%9C%96%E6%9C%89%E7%9C%9F%E7%9B%B8-%E9%87%8E%E8%B1%AC%E8%A5%BF%E7%92%B0%E6%B8%B8%E6%B8%A1%E6%B5%B7%E6%B3%B3-%E8%88%B9%E9%9A%BB%E8%A1%8C%E7%B6%93%E7%85%9E%E5%81%9C%E8%AE%93%E8%B7%AF>.

(11).³¹ This ode was inspired by the above-mentioned incident in which a mischievous wild boar took a dive in the (touristic, traffic-laden) Victoria Harbour and escaped the authorities without being captured. The wild boar embodies the essence of a “free spirit,” skillfully evading advanced monitoring systems and roaming freely. The speaker gestures comradeship by “winking” at it, and continues to address the wild boar as a “savage” that seems to understand the city better than its people. “The hideous who proclaimed to city critters [that] a harbour shouldn’t just be a showcase of yachts, ocean liners, cargo carriers or the rubber duck,/The savage who knew no gapes, glares, scowls, flagged fingers, foul mouths nor threats of guns but followed the smell of the horizon” (11). The savage may look hideous and “uncivilized” while looking beyond the city, Victoria Harbour specifically, and its functions.³² Yet it reverts the harbor to its most primeval and basic function—a space for swimming.

The speaker ends the ode by calling for interspecies solidarity: “The fugitive who would rather drown in vastness of unknown than be repatriated to the same pig-pit, / To all those who are pigheaded, rough and questioning, With you the furred-and-clawed in me is howling in unison” (11). Here, the wild boar is an animal that belongs to nowhere. Yet, the speaker admires the wild boar’s rejection at being sent away and its qualities of being “pigheaded, rough and questioning.” Importantly, the speaker calls for a sense of social solidarity to her readers. The wild boar symbolizes the missing people—the nomadic citizen who does not belong anywhere. This poem offers a space for championing animal rights and de-territorialize the well-defined hierarchy of urban zones. The disruption brought by the wild boar invites people to rethink the very meaning and function of the harbor.

I now shift the focus to the use of languages in “My Tongue” and “Good Morning Mirror.” Like most poems in the collection, “My Tongue” is written in English and Chinese. However, Ng opts for Cantonese, the major spoken language in Hong Kong and also her mother tongue. The poem starts by “degrading” Cantonese by saying that it is “the descendent of pirates and barbarians / tongue of hawkers, triads and band 3 schoolers” (30). The speaker continues with the theme of “Cantonese as a low status language” by employing various images. Cantonese does not sound at all decent as it is described as the “tongue

31 In this section, all the page numbers in parentheses are from Florence Ng, *Waidoleiaaogong dik Jezyu* 維多利亞港的野豬 [Wild Boar in Victoria Harbour] (Hong Kong: Kubrick, 2019). All these translations are my own.

32 Rubber Duck refers to a creation by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman exhibited in Victoria Harbour in 2013. See “Giant Rubber Duck Deflates in Hong Kong Harbour,” *BBC News*, May, 13, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22542006>.

that buzzes and bumps into faces and ears/that none in power can squash or swat it clear." It does not even smell good. It is a vulgar "tongue that stinks like salted fish, shrimp paste,/smelly tofu and fried pig intestines" (30). It is a lingua franca, a tongue that "must be shackled/in brackets or banned from the official." It is a regional tongue that "can't sing to the raised flag/or voice in the great hall of the people." It is a difficult and indecent tongue that "baffles with nine tones/and snaps and shouts and swears all the time" and only belongs to "cha chaan teng [lit. a tea restaurant, or a Hong Kong style cafe] and betting branches/of construction and protest sites" (30).

The speaker highlights the organic but negative, lowbrow aspects of Cantonese, noting that it is marginalized by and therefore cannot appear in mainstream, national, or official discourses. In essence, it qualifies as the missing (written) language of the (missing) people. Although it has no place in canonical literature, Cantonese is closely connected to the lives of the people. "[H]awkers," "salted fish," "shrimp paste," "smelly tofu," "fried pig intestines," "cha chaan teng," "betting branches of construction," "protest sites," and "shouts and swears." By juxtaposing the "substandard" attributes of Cantonese as a written power and the powerful expressiveness of Cantonese as a spoken language, Ng echoes Adar's delineation of the concept of "intensity" in minor literature. Adar argues that by pursuing and amplifying "the disturbing power of the non-standard language," which "would mean foregoing representation in favor of a special treatment of language," the result is "what Deleuze and Guattari call 'intensity.'"³³ However, the intensity in "The Tongue" lies not in its use of a particular language but in the way it celebrates Cantonese.

At the end of the poem, the speakers appeals to the reader by arguing that Cantonese should not disappear because it is "weeds blazed by winds/hatches by its will and has begotten 80 million" and it has a "life tougher than cockroaches and flu/which I will carry and rise in heaven with" (30–31). The speaker thus advocates not the subversion of the existing linguistic (high/low) hierarchy but the fact that Cantonese is connected to the lives of Hong Kong people. Ng aspires to re-territorialize Cantonese by underlining how it is woven into the creative consciousness of Hong Kong people, so much so that the speaker can only be represented by the tongue itself.

In "Good Morning Mirror," Ng notes that authentic self-expression may not mean loyalty to one language. As previously noted, Ng juxtaposes four different

33 Einat Adar, "I Forgot Half the Words': Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* as Minor Literature," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 14, no.1 (2016): 23.

languages in her collection of poetry.³⁴ The effect is at its fullest in this poem because it is written in “Hong Kong Cantonese” and “Cantonglish.” On the margin of the English original, the speaker issues a warning: “WARNING: THIS POEM IS WRITTEN IN WHAT SOME MAY CALL CHINGLISH OR CANTONGLISH. THIS IS NON-STANDARD. PARENTAL GUIDANCE IS SUGGESTED” (59). The Cantonglish version also includes the same warning. The speaker is correct because both versions are written in a colloquial Hong Kong style that appropriates relevant sentence structures and grammar. For example, the poem begins with “Have one line white hair. Umm .../To pluck or not to pluck. That is the question. (Why Shakespeare at this moment chip in?)” (58). While the line is not standard English, it gives the sense of intensity to minor literature, as discussed above. Such an appropriation of English immediately defines a territory that speaks to people who deviate from the official discourse. Nonetheless, the allusion to Shakespeare lays bare the fact that the speaker is capable of writing standard English but chooses not to. The speaker is revealed to be Ng herself when she says, “Ng Chi Yan. You have wisdom and merriness ma? You yesterday live up to your name?” (58).

The speaker’s self-reflexivity directs her to question the significance of her name and her identity. Importantly, she also signifies the untranslatability of Cantonese when she says “Chi-Wisdom. Yan-Merriness. OK lah. Cheese” (58). The speaker deliberately deconstructs her name: “Chi” 智 “Global” means wisdom, and “Yan” 欣 means merriness. She further reflects on her life history: “Yesterday happen what? I eat dinner eat what? My first sentence speak what? To whom? Must be my cat./Dead lah. Old human mad dumb” (58). The sense of disorientation is heightened by a literal translation of the Chinese name of Alzheimer’s disease (老人痴呆) into “old human mad dumb”. This kind of linguistic minoritarian discourse can only be understood by those who understand “the power of the non-standard language.”³⁵ Cantonglish not only showcases Hongkongers’ hybrid language use but also re-territorializes the literary space and strengthens people’s identification with creative multilingualism. This idea echoes another argument raised by Adar: “For the minor writer, language does not describe the external world or an internal psychology but rather disturbs the automatic flow from signifier to signified, turning the

34 Some may counter that Ng is only dealing with two languages with two variations. While I do not intend to extend the discussion to linguistic theorization, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), “language means a system of communication used by a particular country or community.” Since Ng is playing with four distinct communication systems, I retain the framework whereby the anthology concerns four different languages.

35 Adar, “I Forgot Half the Words”: Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy* as Minor Literature,” 23.

reader's attention towards language itself."³⁶ "Multilingualism," Adar stresses "was key in their effort to rethink, reshape, and deterritorialize literature."³⁷ Although the poem does not end with a sense of epiphany or a call for solidarity among those who understand Cantonglish, the speaker is disrupting the presumed "flow from signifier to signified." At the end, the speaker invites readers to ponder these questions: "How do we make sense of language" and "Via what languages do we write about ourselves"? Instead of addressing specific people from a specific place with a specific agenda, Ng uses her transformative language to initiate cultural de/re-territorialization, emphasizing the value of a nonconformist ("incorrect," absent, missing) language to her readers.³⁸

4 *Ghosts with no Umbrella: Transformative Citizenship and a Changing City*

Tse's collection consists of six texts written between 2015 and 2020. *Ghosts with no Umbrella* has received increased critical attention as her readers had been waiting seventeen years for her new creative output. Lo Wai Lok 勞緯洛, a literary critic and writer, suggests that Tse employs "hauntology" in the collection to record various intriguing thoughts and transformations in reflection.³⁹ Lo credits the collection with continuing Tse's "tradition" of the use of magical realism to outline a heteroglossia that is crumbling in the face of various hegemones.⁴⁰ Tang Siu Wah 鄧小樺, an editor, critic, and writer, echoes Lo in highlighting Tse's powerful use of magical realism⁴¹ and suggests that Tse's stories

36 Ibid., 24.

37 Ibid., 31.

38 It is important to note that transformation of language is not an entirely novel idea. Anglophone writers such as Chinua Achebe, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dambudzo Marechera, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Amos Tutuola are also famous for appropriating the "standard English" they inherited from the colonial period. Nonetheless, Ng is dealing with the triangular relationship of English, formal written Chinese, Cantonenglish, and Cantonese.

39 My translation, based on Lo's criticism. See Wai-lok Lo 勞緯洛, "Zhongshengganjie miyuzitong—shitan Xie xiaohong xinshu *Wu Zhe Gui* zhongdi guihun mohuan yu xianshi 眾聲暗結，秘語自通—試談謝曉虹新書《無遮鬼》中的鬼魂、魔幻與現實 [Discrete Unity of Various Voices and Languages: An Attempt to Discuss Ghost, Magical Realism, and Reality in Dorothy Tse's *Ghosts with no Umbrella*]," *Paratext*, January 24, 2021, <https://paratext.hk/?p=3082>.

40 Ibid.

41 Tang is also the editor of *The House of Hong Kong Literature* 香港文學生活館, the publisher of *Ghosts with no Umbrella*.

are inspired by different events in Hong Kong.⁴² The use of magical realism in literature notably blends the real and the unreal. Such transgressions turn Tse's work into a site that emancipates readers' emotions in an age when everyday problems can be difficult to tackle. The depiction of the body, Tang argues, is slightly different from Tse's previous works as it elicits a much stronger sense of pain. The use of the aching body and other symbols is an important call for echoes in contemporary Hong Kong, Tang stresses, because the narrators of the stories do not have a firm grip of their memories.⁴³

Magical realism has been important to the postcolonial canon, having been popularized by luminaries such as Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie. Elleke Boehmer explains that this is because magical realism "combine[s] the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent cultures which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption."⁴⁴ Moses insightfully underlines the relationship between memory and magical realism and suggests that by using the device, authors can "express the nostalgia of global modernity for the traditional worlds it has vanquished and subsumed" and that this act can "allow, indeed encourage, their readers to indulge in a nostalgic longing for and an imaginary return to a world that is past, or passing away."⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the Hong Kong context is more complex, and nostalgia does not arise in Tse's work. Rather than imagining a return to the past, she uses magical realism to present different individuals' intangible and fragmentary memory in a specific social and cultural context. Tse's take on memory is intriguing. Aleida Assmann argues that "memory boom reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to rediscover, to revalue, and to reassess it as a part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider historical perspective. It also provides a repository for group affinities, loyalties, and identity in a post-individualist age."⁴⁶

42 See Tang, "Editor's Note," in Dorothy Tse's *Mo Ze Gwai* [Ghosts with no Umbrella] (Hong Kong: The House of Hong Kong Literature, 2021), v–vi.

43 My translation, based on Tang's critique. See "Deng Xiaohua: chengshi de mimi: Xie Xiaohong *Wu Zhe Gui* 鄧小樺：城市的秘密：謝曉虹《無遮鬼》 [Tang Siu Wah: Secrets of the City: Dorothy Tse's *Ghosts with no Umbrella*]," Formless Particles, March 31, 2021, YouTube video, 13:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9mQnwysA14&t=13s>.

44 Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 235.

45 Michael Valdez Moses, "Magical Realism at World's End," *Literary Imagination: Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics* 3 (2001): 105–106.

46 Aleida Assmann, "To Remember or to Forget: Which Way Out of a Shared History of Violence?," in *Memory and Political Change*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 54.

In other words, collective memory plays a significant role in forging a sense of solidarity among a people because it serves as a connection between the individual and the community by reclaiming the past.

Nonetheless, Tse's magical realist works reveal that memory is highly volatile. In "Vanished Water, Flowing City" (2020), the first person narrator presents his (futile) memory, and his (failed) understanding of his hometown. The novella revolves around his traumatic and hallucinatory memory, and he claims that he lost his sister and mother in the city. The narrator begins the story by admitting to the readers that he "can no longer prove [that] what" he said is "the truth" because the landscape has already changed (2).⁴⁷

To the narrator, the city has vanished metaphorically, and all he can do is rely on the "contaminated memory that is blessed by the hippocampus (the physical form of the god of memory)" (2). He concedes that his memory is chaotic (3), yet an unreliable memory can still allow him to reflect on histories that bare no "self-reflection" (5). The orthodox history is a master narrative that "interprets the success and failure of an era," it interprets the silence of its people as a "form of blessing that leads to prosperity and stability" (5). The narrator is also bothered by the transience of time. He sees a waiter visibly age in a split second.⁴⁸ The waiter's powerlessness echoes the memories of his family's migration to the city. He recalls that memory, but, at this point, it fails to remind him that he has a sister who has passed away.

From this point onward, the narrator's sister appears in his memory and in the magical realist space in the form of a ghost. She reminds him that the possession of a memory is important because "we can dance freely, but we have to be very cautious at the same time. Otherwise, we will realize that our tips of our fingers are all attached to thin fishing lines." (10). In that sense, memory does not serve a nostalgic function; rather, it is a strategic mindset that enables us to enjoy happiness and to pursue peaceful co-existence with other citizens.

This delicate equilibrium soon disappears due to numerous mysterious deaths in the city. Tse portrays the sudden arrival of a culture of death and disappearance as more than two thousand corpses are discovered with no specified cause of death, and there are more than two hundred suicides (19). The narrator—a student—is asked to sign school notices promising that "I am happy. I will not commit suicide" (19). At that point, the narrator realizes that he "can no longer tell what has disappeared." He can "hear a daunting

47 In this section, all the page references in parentheses are from Dorothy Tse, *Mo Ze Gwai* 無遮鬼 [Ghosts with no Umbrella] (Hong Kong: The House of Hong Kong Literature, 2021). All these translations are my own.

48 Ibid., 9.

sound of lightening hitting the ground,” and his “memory is shattered into a kaleidoscope” (20). This fragmentation also makes him doubt the realness of his sister. “No one is willing to acknowledge my sister’s existence,” not even his mother (27).

The inability of the narrator to recall the past slowly builds tension in the novella, but this frustration is a direct result of the disappearance of people in the city. “[O]ne day, we were listening to this song, his name disappeared on the TV all of a sudden, and then his face followed by his hand that is holding the microphone—but we could still hear his singing” (26). Popular culture seems to vanish along with history. It is only by clinging onto his memory that the narrator can retain his sense of reality. His memory serves as the vehicle that allows him to retain his identity, an identity that marks his transformed state of existence.

Significantly, the narrator’s mother also becomes part of that disappearing reality. The incident occurs on the day his mother finds that the lotus root she bought from the market is not in fact a lotus root at all. She goes back to the market to seek “justice” from the seller, acknowledging that “new illegal hawkers” disrupt the order of the market (31). The narrator understands that his mother is primarily concerned with these new hawkers and their goods of unknown origin (33). She and other housewives are deeply upset by this phenomenon, and they resort to occupying the market. It is a peaceful event—these women simply sit on the ground holding their lotus roots day after day. The lotus roots remain miraculously fresh and even develop some “muscle” (47). Nonetheless, the police soon arrive and tackle these women with guns and bullets.

Tension escalates as the narrator joins others to demand the release of the housewives, only to find themselves hit by police water cannons. The news goes viral, but the abundance of information quickly culminates in a point of convergence—a vanishing point that cancels other points of reference. On television, the police proclaim his mother to be “a counter-revolutionary coming from a criminal organization disguised as housewives” (57). The disappeared boundary between television and reality also confuses his father.

In the middle of the story, the narrator seems to have been killed because he recalls that “a bullet is flying to me squarely” (59). Memory fails him, again but the story goes on despite his death. The traumatized narrator meets more and more ghosts whose memories are also fading. One suit-wearing ghost is stuck on an MTR train. At this point, the narrator’s transient memory can no longer fill the gaps in his story. These gaps showcase his trauma and the failed return of the repressed past. In other words, Tse’s narrative contrasts the fabricated

authenticity of collective memory with the intangibility of individual memory to note the evolving memories of the characters and the people.

Tse also lays bare the gaps between a failing memory and an elusive personal history to hint at the problem of disappearance. This is made clear when the narrator reads a letter from his sister claiming that he has died. His sister informs him: "In fact, you understand better than anyone. We have never left, you are the only one who has left" (103). The letter then unfolds how the narrator insisted on leaving home despite the fact that everybody received a warning on the phone. Rather than stopping him, his mother merely reminds him that, "We are making lotus roots soup tonight, don't be late" (104). In the face of others, his sister publicly denies that the narrator has ever lived. This episode singles out the malleability of memory because people's narratives can easily alter history and reality. It is because of a residual, traumatized, private memory that the narrator, his sister, and their parents can re-construct their own (his)stories with varying degrees of success. Amnesic individuals live in the gap—a cramped space—between the official, public discourse and the unofficial, unconfirmed stories; ironically, this gap is the centripetal force that holds the dead or missing people together.

5 *Lorries Returning to the South: the Alienated Assemblage of Enunciation*

Wong's tales go beyond "the collective assemblage of enunciation" because of his interest in the "underdogs"⁴⁹ His goal is therefore to portray a group of people that is missing in mainstream narratives. Compared with Ng and Tse, Wong belongs to a younger generation of Hong Kong writers. His short story collection includes works written between 2013 and 2021. In 2014, the titular story won him a literary prize at City University of Hong Kong, where he was majoring in Chinese. In a criticism published on *Linking Vision*, it is argued that the word "south" in *Return to the South* exemplifies a sense of localness.⁵⁰ Importantly, Wong aspires to give voice to the marginalized people in Hong Kong.

49 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 18.

50 See SF, "Mingming, xijie yu bieyang de Xianggang: du *Nanguì Huoche*: Xinjiexi duanpian gushiji 命名、細節與別樣的香港：讀《南歸貨車：新界西短篇故事集》 [Naming, Details, and an Alternative Hong Kong: Reading *Lorries Returning to the South*]," Sixiang kongjian 思想空間 (Linking Vision), April 21, 2022, <https://www.linking.vision/?p=10818>.

Wong claims that he values the power of epiphany—the “literary moments” that allow characters to experience enlightenment. Epiphany makes visions of empowerment possible even though it is brief. To Wong Yat, however, the collection narrowly focuses on characters that quickly become disillusioned after a brief period of epiphanic hope. It seems that, as Wong Yat claims, joy and bitterness are interconnected.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the author himself explained the rationale behind his collection in two interviews. In an interview by *P-articles*, he notes that there are three common themes in the short story collection: people and the environment, struggles, and all living beings.⁵² To Wong, literature allows people to communicate in spite of temporal and spatial constraints.

In an interview conducted for Kowloon City Book Fair 2020, Wong mentions that there are five overarching keywords in his works: century, torch, struggle, love, and place.⁵³ He explains that he is writing at the turn of a century where many discourses converge in the postcolonial space. He hopes that his work can empower the powerless by giving them the ability to struggle and carry on. He emphasizes that struggles fuel our everyday life, and love can enable the marginalized to build a network of support. He also mentions that the western New Territories are important to him because it is not only one of the poorest areas of Hong Kong (he lives in Tuen Mun) but also the intersection of the countryside and the urban area. Nature is important because it enables humans to regain power and energize their struggles when they feel discouraged.

The titular work, “Lorries Returning to the South,” portrays the stories of two cross-border truck drivers, Fai and Brother Tuck, who divide their time between Hong Kong and mainland China. *Return South* (南歸) is a nod to Tian Han’s play in which two young lovers are separated by a war-torn China in the

51 Yat Wong 王日, “*Nanguì Huoche de chouxian zhuangtai* 《南歸貨車》的抽象狀態 [The Abstract Condition of *Lorries Returning to the South*],” literatureHK, August 10, 2021, <https://www.literaturehk.com/new-blog-52/tag/%E5%8D%97%E6%AD%B8%E8%B2%A8%E8%BB%8A>.

52 See Ng Tsz Ling’s 吳芷寧 interview of Ching Hang Wong in “Zuyi dikang baihuai de wenxue shiki—zhuanfang Wang zhengheng *Nanguì Huoche* 足以抵抗敗壞的文學時刻——專訪王証恒《南歸貨車》 (Literary Moments Strong Enough to Resist Destruction and Decay—An Exclusive Interview with Ching Hang Wong, the Author of *Lorries Returning to the South*),” *p-articles*, June 10, 2021, <https://p-articles.com/heteroglossia/2199.html>.

53 Ching Hang Wong, “Jiulongcheng shujie di shierjie jiangzuo zuowei geming de wenxue—*Nanguì Huoche* xinshu yugao 九龍城書節 第十二屆 講座作為革命的文學——南歸貨車新書預告 [Kowloon City 12th Book Fair Seminar: Literature as Revolution: A Preview of *Lorries Returning to the South*],” Cantonese Reading Academy, June 22, 2022, YouTube video, 12:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nHuiMQzFuk>.

late 1920s. However, the situation in Hong Kong is that geo-economic pressure can likewise destroy relationships. Fai and Brother Tuck are truck drivers who transport goods between Hong Kong and Dongguan. Their job requires them to lead tough lives as they often have to work overnight and tackle dangerous routes. Brother Tuck once reminded Fai that “when you drive on a highway in mainland China, you can never leave the car. If you want to smoke, you smoke in the car. Even if you see someone hurt or dead, pretend that you can’t see that” (81–2).⁵⁴ Cross-border truck drivers never get the attention of Hong-kongers because they are often stereotyped as living unstable lives and having extramarital relationships with girls in mainland China. Brother Tuck is one such character. He has an affair with a girl called “Bing” only to find that Bing has cheated on him.⁵⁵ He seeks out her new boyfriend, but the latter turns out to be a mainland police officer, and Brother Tuck is shot dead.

In the novel, extramarital affairs in China offer compensation for the failed Hong Kong dream of men. When Fai meets Brother Tuck’s wife for the first time at his funeral, he finds that Tuck’s wife and mistress resemble each other. The affair with Bing is therefore a nostalgic act for Tuck to recapture happy days with his wife in their early years, even though he must live a tough life later as a cross-border truck driver. In his stories, Wong also portrays the life of another kind of invisible people in Hong Kong—the new immigrants. Fai meets his wife because his work takes him to anonymous and remote villages in mainland China. After they are married, his wife wants to join Fai in Hong Kong, but she cannot adapt to her new situation: “After coming to Hong Kong, she got thinner and thinner. Her face is sunken. She always sits next to the window looking at the hills. Fai doesn’t understand why she is sad” (87). The difference between her hometown and her new home combined with the fact that Fai must divide his time between Hong Kong and mainland China heightens her sense of alienation. As she is new to the city, she struggles to find a job and cannot establish a social circle in a cramped space. To Fai and his wife, there is yet a way to look for a collective assemblage of enunciation. All they have is an alienated life on the margin of an affluent society.

In “Minor Writing and Minor Literature,” Ronald Bogue explains that Deleuze “invents a way of thinking about a work, one that has the dual purpose of articulating the logic of a work’s construction from the perspective of the artist and of formulating philosophical concepts of sufficient inner

54 In this section, all page numbers in parentheses are from Ching Hang Wong, *Naam Gawi Fo Ce* 南歸貨車 [Lorries Returning to the South] (Hong Kong: Postscript Cultural Collaboration, 2021). All these translations are my own.

55 “Bing” 冰 means ice.

consistency to sustain that logic.”⁵⁶ Bogue’s observation resonates with Wong’s approach, in which the latter creates what Bogue calls “a philosophical analog” to invite readers to revisit everyday characters as well as Hong Kong society. “The purpose of his analysis is to think alongside the work of art, not to explain it or stand in for it” but to invite “the reader to imagine the work in a new way that necessarily entails a new understanding of the world.”⁵⁷ Instead of idealizing love as a means of connecting people and building solidarity, love fails. Fai hints that his love for his wife has a lot to do with proving his own existence: “He begins to realize that his pleasure lies not in that singular moment but [in] the sound of her breathing and the way she calls him Brother Fai in Cantonese. Brother Tuck said this is love” (92). As her depression gets more and more serious, Fai cannot cheer her up no matter what he buys her. His last resort is to quit his job and work as a taxi driver. He realizes he will have less income, but he hopes that they will have a better life after having a baby. Fai’s sense of powerlessness portrays the struggle of the invisible people.

Extramarital affairs as a form of illicit, marginalized love for the marginalized also play an important role in “Frozen Time.” The female protagonist and her colleague Fai, a married man, teach Chinese in a secondary school in the western New Territories and their struggle for survival remains invisible to many. Although they have jobs that are widely regarded as respectable and stable, they must struggle against a malfunctioning education system. Rather than spending time on teaching or working with students, they must fabricate documents to be inspected by external reviewers from the Education Bureau. It is in this context that they begin an affair. Teaching has never been a major duty because of never-ending administrative work. The school system also crushes their spirit because it requires them to renew their contracts every now and then, making their life unstable. In the story, the narrator and Fai only have their contracts renewed by their principal two days before each new academic year.

Nonetheless, the lovebirds manage to find ways to resist all the oppressive practices. As they prepare school documents, they exaggerate the details here and there so the examiners can easily spot various issues. Nature also offers a refuge for them to reinvigorate their spirits. The narrative is infused with imagery of untamed nature. Smoking in deserted greenery close to their campus allows them to regain strength. Mui Wo, a rural town on the east coast of Lantau Island, is also a sanctuary for them to spend a night together.

56 Ronald Bogue, “Minor Writing and Minor Literature,” *Symploke* 5, no. 1/2 (1997): 115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780041561561>.

57 *Ibid.*, 115.

The common feature in Wong's stories is a sense of open-endedness. Wong lays bare the life of small people and their struggles but never provides easy answers. In reality, there is no way out for many people. Paul Haynes argues that the power of good literature is not to give answers but to transform readers: "All great literature is minor literature to the extent that it creates its own standard" and "prefigurative in giving a voice to that which is not given: a 'people to come'—that is, a people whose identity is a work in progress, in a state of creation and transformation."⁵⁸ Wong's works feature (invisible) small people such as construction site workers, secondary school teachers, police, and sex workers (both from mainland China and Hong Kong). Thus he calls out his readers to build a sense of solidarity for a "people to come."⁵⁹

6 Conclusion

In 1997, Gordon Mathews argued that "*Heunggongyahn* [Hongkongers] may soon be dead; but from the ashes of that identity, [...] a resurgent, independent *junggwokiyahn* [Chinese] may emerge. If this comes to pass, the demise of *heunggongyahn* will have been a worthy cultural sacrifice indeed."⁶⁰ Within the framework of minor literature, I argue that *Heunggongyahn* need not die. Instead, they can thrive creatively in the cramped space in the contemporary literary landscape. Writers can portray a diverse array of individuals and their submerged discourse. Ng's poetry collection not only de-territorialize but also re-territorialize Hong Kong's multilingualism. Ng's seamless combinations of formal English, formal Chinese, Cantonglish, and Cantonese points to a re-formation of different languages. In Tse's collection, various haunted individuals are marked by their traumatic memory and transformed consciousness. In response to an ever-evolving reality, history, and memory, Tse portrays a group of individuals who try to tell their (his)stories and re-territorialize their homeplace. Wong's short stories often go beyond any "collective assemblage of enunciation." Rather, his tales showcase the struggles of small people and the fight against the fate of being ruled out and ignored.

58 Haynes, "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Intertextual Writing: Cultural Appropriation and Minor Literature," 296.

59 Ibid., 296.

60 Ibid. "*Heunggongyahn*" 香港人 means "HK people" whereas "*junggwokiyahn*" 中國人 means Chinese people.

Ken Gale notes that the status of “becoming” is a complex one: “becoming” is always an act of “reaching out” to the world.⁶¹ It “offer[s] challenge to the dominating structural forces of the ‘major literature’ by offering a world of language usage.”⁶² In short, the art of becoming is emancipating, self-evolving, and self-validating, and people have the capacity to just “be.” In “Frozen Time,” a story featured in *Lorries Returning to the South*, the dialogue between the narrator and her lover aptly illustrates this circumstance.

“If a tree very far away falls, no one knows, does the tree exist?” I asked.

“Exist,” he said.

“But what is the significance of this tree?”

He thought and replied “No” (158).

The disappearance of a tree in a forest may seem insignificant, but the writer’s creative story about the tree in a cramped literary space can embody the art of becoming, transforming the established meanings and language of the epoch. This deterritorialized consciousness can be followed by reterritorialization, where new structures and meanings are formed, highlighting the dynamic possibilities of an integrative culture and identity.

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61 Ibid., 120.

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PART 2

Hong Kong Dream and the Culture Compass



Positive and Negative Orientalism: “China as a Career”

Chi Sum Garfield Lau

1 Introduction

When Edward Said (1935–2003) published *Orientalism* in 1978, the book had a major impact in academia. The book opens with two epigraphs taken from the period of Victorian imperialism: the first is from the political philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883), the other from former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881). Marx’s words are taken from his 1852 book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” The context is that Napoleon Bonaparte would like “to appear as the patriarchal benefactor of all classes. But he cannot give to one class without taking from another.”¹ The second quote is taken from Disraeli’s 1847 novel *Tancred*: “The East is a career.”² The context is that “even Napoleon regretted that he had ever re-crossed the Mediterranean” because he could have stayed in the East and been better off.³ Orientalism highlights a paradox: on the one hand, the East is a profitable economic realm that can provide careers for Westerners; on the other hand, the “Us/Them, Occident/Orient” binaries mean that the East must be a disempowered domain in which citizens’ political and cultural identity should be enunciated and constructed from a Western perspective.

Said directs his readers to debunk the political and financial motives and the East/West power dynamics. While the Occident is fascinated by the possibility of building a career in the Orient, David Scott points out Said’s contestation of grand narratives of the West and their political and economic imperialistic drive to dominate the place:

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), XIII. See also Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Mondial, 1852/2005), 84, 46.

2 Ibid., XIII.

3 Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred: The New Crusade* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1847), 161.

[Said] saw [that] such Orientalist writers as being bound by established assumptions about the Orient, assumptions reflecting a dominant ideology (his “Orientalism”) in which Western imperial power shaped images in the West, and in which the individual writer seems insignificant.⁴

As a result, the Orient is the symbol of chance and terror, barbarism and cultural refinement. In the words of Said, orientalism is “a form of paranoia.”⁵ In the book, he is acutely aware that the reconstructed “Orient” is highly anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic; at the same time, he also admits the limit of his discussion of orientalism. His focus is on a selected part of Asia:

I shall discuss presently I limited that already limited (but still inordinately large) set of questions to the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam, which for almost a thousand years together stood for the Orient. Immediately upon doing that, a large part of the Orient seemed to have been eliminated – India, Japan, China, and other sections of the Far East [...].⁶

In this chapter, I will examine two famous texts and highlight how foreigners position China and Hong Kong. The renowned Chinese journalist Duan Liancheng 段連城 (1926–1998) argues that the Western understanding of China can be divided into nine stages:

(1) **the Splendid China** in Marco Polo’s accounts; (2) **the Enigmatic China** that began to practice isolationism since the mid-Ming dynasty (1460–1552; Ming dynasty: 1368–1644); (3) **the “Inferior” China** forced to set up treaty ports after the Opium Wars; (4) **the Promising China** marked by the Chinese people’s resistance against Japanese aggression; (5) **the “Resourceful” and “Blue Ant” China**, i.e. the People’s Republic of China founded in 1949 (abbr. the PRC, also known as the New China) during which most Chinese wore blue due to the then-limited textile industry; (6) **the Frenzied and Turbulent China** undergoing the “Cultural Revolution” (1966–1976); (7) **the “Shangri-La” China** promoted by the US President Richard Nixon (1913–1994, in office: 1969–1974) to the rest of the

4 David Scott, “Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: ‘Orientalism’ Reoriented?” *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (June 2011): 300. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23011713>.

5 Said, *Orientalism*, 72.

6 *Ibid.*, 16–17.

world; (8) **the "Survivor" China** in the early stage of reform and opening-up; and (9) **the China in a Great Experiment**, i.e., China on the rise.⁷

In the twentieth-first century, China has indeed provided careers for many people from different parts of the world. In 2022, China was ranked the world's second-largest economy worldwide.⁸ Thus many sinologists, lay people, and students are eager to know more about China or learn Chinese.

Does this Sinomania produce new discourses to cancel the orientalist assumption, or does it merely perpetuate the orientalist dynamic in new forms? In *The Financial Times*, Martin Wolf suggests that the rise of China's political and economic powers may mark the end of the East/West, rich/poor, culture/barbarism binaries:

The economic rise of Asia's giants is the most important story of our age. It heralds the end, in the not too distant future, of as much as five centuries of domination by the Europeans and their colonial offshoots.⁹

However, Au Loong-yu 區龍宇, the author of *China's Rise: Strength and Fragility* (2013), believes that China has just "found a way to benefit in a twist of historical irony from its colonial legacy."¹⁰ The boom is an ironic twist in the colonial legacy, not an end to it.

This (negative) view of China still living in the shadow of the colonial past is not uncommon among the new generation of China experts. Gregory B. Lee studies the formulation of modern China and suggests that "the texts, contexts and transtexts of China's modernity [were] a modernity that was a product of Western colonialism."¹¹ Bryna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman note that the West's administrative, commercial, and military developments greatly influenced China. As a result, China has to struggle to find its own identity:

7 Quoted from Xiangfei Meng, *National Image: China's Communication of Cultural Symbols* (Singapore: Springer, 2020), 19–20. Emphasis original.

8 "Top 15 Countries by GDP in 2022," Global PEO Services, <https://globalpeoservices.com/top-15-countries-by-gdp-in-2022>.

9 Quoted in Dilip K. Das, *China and India: A Tale of two Economies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), XI.

10 Quoted in Ashley Smith, "China's Rise as a World Power," *International Socialist Review*, no. 112 (Spring 2019), n.p., <https://isreview.org/issue/112/chinas-rise-world-power>.

11 Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 4.

[A]lthough China was not formally a colony, colonial projects, rhetoric, categories, and practices of violence, plunder, and exhibition nonetheless “violently place[d] China firmly within a colonial world and its forms of power knowledge.”¹²

In this chapter, I will supplement Said’s view and highlight what I call different kinds of “orientalist orientations,” noting the extreme differences between positive affirmation and toxic negativity. I will present two types of China experts and their orientalist unconscious while favoring a nuanced picture of the differences between male/female and etic/emic perspectives. What do these early China experts purport to do? Do they want to know and become the other in order to study the other, thereby combining emic and etic, insider and outsider perspectives? Or do they want to see the other from the outside (the etic perspective) and confirm their preconceived ideology of the other? Do they emphasize impersonal facts or personal fantasies in order to produce and justify unequal economic relations and cultural complacency? Do they gather knowledge among natives to enrich mutual exchange or legitimize the home country’s empire-building project? The changes of orientalist discourse showcase ever-evolving aspects of culture and people’s perceptions. Stuart Hall therefore reminds us that “to think through the complexities and ambiguities of New Times is simply to open our minds to the deeply cultural character of the revolution of our times.”¹³

In terms of scope, I will confine myself to two iconic travel writers because John Culbert observes that “[o]ne of the inspiring innovations of Said’s book was precisely its critical attention to travel writing.”¹⁴ I will explore the pros and cons of these two different travel narratives produced when China was perceived dissimilarly by the West, taking note of the fact that culture shock can intensify culture appreciation or alienation. I will begin by analyzing the venerable yet debatable depiction of China under Kublai Khan in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (1300) to demonstrate how the East is both a career and an object of Western fantasies. Attention is placed on Marco Polo’s positive portrayal of China under the nomadic Mongols and his understanding towards the distinction of these warriors’ different ethnicity from the majority of the population

12 Bryna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman, “Introduction: Colonialism and China,” in *Twentieth-century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday and the World*, eds. Bryna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 7.

13 Stuart Hall, “The Meaning of New Times,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 232.

14 John Culbert, “Theory and the Limits of Travel,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 22, no. 4 (2018): 343, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2019.1624072>.

as Han Chinese. Then, to proceed with the disentangling of Chinese communities' features through the tradition of travelogues, the discussion moves to Martha Gellhorn's travel writing *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir* (1978). Unlike Marco Polo's fantasized narration, her pronouncement on issues related to the vast wealth gap in Hong Kong is a realistic record of social stratification during British colonial governance. A comparison of these two travel writings exemplify how we can learn from history and re-appropriate historical legacy to work with the other, bypassing the "East/West," "insider/outsider," "superior/inferior" orientalist unconscious in order to achieve happy co-existence and move forward.

2 Positive Orientalism: Marco Polo and His Expatriate Assimilation

The Travels of Marco Polo (1300) is one of the most famous works of travel writing about Imperial China. It is distinctive because Polo offered a highly positive yet debatable picture of China and Kublai Khan, putting China above the West in the pre-colonial era. His story is pioneering in the sense that Polo directed his Western readers to see that the East could be a career and an object of fantasies. However, despite his pioneering attempt to present the East to the West, this work remains controversial. In the first place, Polo sought a career in the East due to his profession as a Venetian explorer, writer, and merchant. In 1298, he was in prison in Genoa due to the war between Venice and Genoa and co-wrote the travelogue *Devisement du monde* (*Description of the World*) with cellmate and Arthurian romance writer Rustichello da Pisa (1272–1300). The work was also known as *Il Milione* (*Books of the Marvels of the World*) or *The Travels of Marco Polo* in English. Polo was freed in 1299 and released the book in the same year. The success of the book was instant: people were fascinated by his life in Asia and the court of the Great Khan. "[I]t was the first account of travel into Asia composed by a layman in the vernacular, and the longest such account when it appeared."¹⁵

The status of the text leads to questions of authorship and unreliable reconstruction. Moreover, the content displays limitations and inadequacies due to Polo's portrayal of Chinese people, landscapes, and customs.¹⁶ Polo's idea of

15 Mark Cruse, "A Quantitative Analysis of Toponyms in a Manuscript of Marco Polo's *Devisement du monde*," *Speculum* 92, no. 51 (October 2017): S247, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26583712?seq=2>.

16 Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 14–22.

China is skewed: the text divides China into Cathay in the north and Manzi in the south. In the eyes of Westerners and Muslims, Cathay meant northern China, but the term itself indicates orientalism because its origin referenced Khitans (契丹), a nomadic group that ruled northern China from 916 to 1125. Khitans became *Cathai* in ancient Uyghur, and the term was picked up by Russian and Europeans. Meanwhile, Manji (蠻子) literally means “barbarians.” Though the text contains descriptions of Cathayans’ worship of idolatry and how they observe filial piety, these portrayals are kept to a minimum.

In terms of content, Polo devotes an entire chapter to eulogizing the colonizer, Mongol ruler Kublai Khan (1215–1294, grandson of Genghis Khan [1162–1227]), who established the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). Comparatively speaking, the Han people and their everyday life did not seem to interest him much. In justifying why Polo has not written about local practices of the Han people as favored by Western visitors, Chinese historian Dali Yao 姚大力 reckons how Polo’s acquaintance was limited to the ruling class of the Yuan court. The use of the Mongolian language in his social circle deprived him from having any genuine encounter with the Han people.¹⁷ The Great Khan unified China after defeating the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in 1279. The Khan and his armies were Mongols and were thus considered colonizers and minorities from the north, to be differentiated from the Han Chinese, the majority group in many parts of China. However, Polo’s worship of the Mongols was not without a reason. Genghis Khan controlled the eastern section of the Silk Road, conquered many parts of China and Central Asia, Persia, Afghanistan, Central Europe, and some parts of Hungary. The Mongols amassed immense wealth. When Han people rebelled against them, Polo sided with the empire and normalized Mongol military control over the rebellious subjects:

This is a convenient place to record a few facts about the armies of the Great Khan. You should know that in all the provinces of the Cathay and Manzi and in all the rest of his dominions there are many disaffected and disloyal subjects who, if they had the chance, would rebel against their lord.¹⁸

17 Dali Yao 姚大力, *Tianma nanmu: Yuanchao de shehui yu wenhua* 「天馬」南牧：元朝的社會與文化 [Wars in Eurasian Land: Society and Culture of the Yuan Dynasty], ed. Jian Xiong Ge 葛劍雄 (Hong Kong: Open Page, 1997), 68.

18 Marco Polo, “Kublai Khan,” in *The History of Mongolia*, eds. David Sneath and Christopher Kaplonski, trans. Ronald Latham (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 402.

Given Polo's friendship with the Khan, the Han Chinese were associated with disaffection and disloyalty while the Khan's authoritarian militarism was applauded:

These armies the Great Khan changes every two years, and so likewise the captains who command them. And with this bridle to restrain them, the people stay quiet and cannot cause any disturbance or insurrection.¹⁹

Peter Jackson, an expert on Mongol history, notes that Marco Polo's journey to the East indicated not only the worship of military might but also the power of gold. The journey begins with a commercial expedition by two Venetian brothers and traveling merchants Maffeo and Niccolò Polo from "Constantinople to the lands of the Golden Horde."²⁰ This aim of finding business opportunities and an accidental encounter with a Tartar ambassador led the Polos to the East, where they met the great Khan, who requested them to ask the Pope to send him many learned men to justify the merits of Christianity. The Polos accepted the challenge and went to Venice, but the new Pope sent them only two friars, who both quickly gave up the journey due to the fear of war and dangers. The Polo brothers and Niccolò's teenage son Marco journeyed on into what Jackson refers to as a "diplomatic mission."²¹ They presented holy oil to the Khan, and the Khan was delighted with the young man's perceptiveness, hence Marco Polo "never ceased to be employed as an ambassador."²² Having spent seventeen years in Yuan's China (1275–1292), Marco Polo had a splendid and glamorous life under the patronage of Khan. He visited the hunting palace at Shangdu (上都 or Xanadu) and had a chance to travel to many towns and ports.

Given his family background in trade, Marco Polo saw that the Mongols were outstanding traders that controlled the Silk Road:

Yuan China's most compelling weapon was—despite the Mongol's bloody reputation—not the sword but trade: gems, fabrics, spices, metals and so on. It was trade routes, not the projection of military power, that

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Maffeo Polo and Niccolò Polo were Marco Polo's uncle and father, respectively. See Peter Jackson, "Marco Polo and His 'Travels,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 1 (1998): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00015779>.

²¹ Jackson, "Marco Polo and His 'Travels,'" 96.

²² Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo With Notes by Hugh Murray* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1844), 103.

emblemized the “Pax Mongolica.” Mongol grand strategy was built on commerce much more than on war.²³

As a merchant, he was particularly interested in the salt trade in Yuan China:

Marco Polo not only mentioned the salt and salt currency of Yunnan and *Tebet*, but also presented a detailed description of the salt production in Chenglu in Southeastern Hebei and made more general remarks on the production, taxation and trade of salt in the famous Lianghuai salt zone.²⁴

Given his preferences, “Polo’s failure to mention foot-binding, tea drinking, or the Great Wall” seemed unimportant.²⁵

Polo’s positive portrayal of China is manifold, but he greatly valued the Yuan market and military might, and his journey to the East was a rewarding one because he became both an insider and an outsider in the Chinese community. On a personal level, Richard Bressler claims that “[t]he Polos made out well financially on their trip” and returned with “gems sewn into the clothes” when they arrived back in Venice in 1295.²⁶ Polo may have glorified China even more because upon leaving China, he was “robbed of some of [his] merchandise” and was later imprisoned in Genoa.²⁷ As a war captive, he recalled and might have exaggerated the good old days as an honorable guest of the Khan.

The Polos’ approach highlights assimilationism, and positive orientalism impacted the travelers greatly. They strived to learn the ways of the other, and they became totally otherized. When they returned to Venice, it was said that they were “so completely altered,—their dress, appearance, and even language had become so foreign,—that their nearest friends were unable to recognize them.”²⁸ The Polo brothers communicated with the Khan and gave “judicious replies in the Tartar language, which they had learned.” Marco Polo also quickly “acquired the Tartar and four other languages, so as to speak and write them well; he learned also their manners, and became in all things exceedingly sensible and sagacious.” He mingled with different kinds of peoples and gave

23 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Return of Marco Polo’s World: War, Strategy, and American Interests in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Random House, 2018), 11–12.

24 Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues*, 6.

25 Jackson, “Marco Polo and His ‘Travels,’” 82.

26 Richard Bressler, *The Thirteenth Century: A World History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2018), 205.

27 Ibid.

28 Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo With Notes by Hugh Murray*, 91.

reports on the varieties of nations—much to the delight of the great Khan. He wrote that, in China, his "knowledge of the country" exceeded "any other person who ever visited it."²⁹

The Polos might have experienced culture shock, but Marco Polo offered no Eurocentric judgment because of his expatriate mentality, and a preference for market and military might. His favorite city was Hangzhou and he called it Kinsai. He compared it with Venice because the city is "wholly on the water" and had "12,000 stone bridges."³⁰ Polo was very much overawed by the city's "4,000 baths," the state of the roads, and the wealth of the merchants.³¹ He wrote that it took thirty days to journey from Hangzhou to "Kambalu" (汗八里, Khanbaliq is today's Beijing, also the capital of the Yuan Dynasty). The Khan's mightiness and wealth made the kingdom seemed like wonderland even though Marco witnessed political violence and knew that huge taxes were "derived from wine, rice, coal, and from the twelve arts."³² The paradox of Marco Polo is that while he might seem open and non-judgmental to the radical ways of the other, his core values were centered on money, military power, and authoritarian rule.

Marco Polo's positive portrayal of China fired the imagination of Italians regarding the Khan's governmentality and the potentials of Chinese trade. The early emphasis was not on empire building but on familiarizing oneself with the ways of foreigners and making more money at home. Polo famously mentioned the use of paper money in Yuan China, and many in the West at first considered it a fable. His tales aroused Italians' interest in Chinese trade, and Yuan China's trading partners were largely Italian republics such as Genoa and Venice. The West became more and more invested in China. In 1245, Pope Innocent IV sent a party of envoys to the East. However, this first Christian mission to China was not successful. Upon their return, John de Plano Carpini, Archbishop of Antivari, mentioned the Mongols' life and the oppression of tax-gatherers in *Historia Mongalorum*, written in around the 1240s.³³ In 1323, a bishopric was established in Quanzhou, Fujian (福建泉州). In Yangzhou (today's Jiangsu 江蘇揚州), a tombstone dated 1342 recorded the "death of an Italian lady whose name suggests some relation to a Venetian family

29 Ibid., 98, 103.

30 Ibid., 187, 188.

31 Ibid., 189.

32 Ibid., 198.

33 John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis, *The Texts and Version of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis*, ed. C. Raymond Beazley (1598; reis., London: Hakluyt Society, 1903), 316.

engaged in trade with Asia.”³⁴ In the fourteenth century, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti compiled *Pratica della mercatura* (the *Merchant's Handbook*), a book series about foreign trade that detailed trade routes to Beijing and confirmed the wide circulation of paper money among merchants in China.³⁵ However, the author's main concern was utterly indifferent to the locals' views or their customs. The focus was on the length of the journey, safety, staffing, and the purchase of commodities (damask silk in particular).

How did the Chinese respond? The Khan built a multi-ethnic empire and was both an insider and outsider in the Chinese community. He encouraged varying degrees of assimilation in order to stabilize his regime. He crushed rebels but welcomed the arrival of good-willed sojourners, not minding their (orientalist) assumptions and appreciation. In fact, he “took a pleasure in hearing accounts of whatever was new to him respecting the customs and manners of people, and the peculiar circumstances of distant countries.”³⁶ However, the Han people might have responded differently. The Ming dynasty's (1368–1644) Sino-centrism and nationalism led to a diminished interest in the West. When the trade routes with the Far East were blocked by the Turks after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, Europeans realized they had to find another trade route.

3 Negative Orientalism: Martha Gellhorn and a Sojourner's Exile Consciousness

As navigators found direct trading routes to reach the Far East, trade along the traditional silk route declined due to European domination of maritime trade in the nineteenth century. China fell victim to European imperialism in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). The weakness of the Qing court encouraged foreign powers to impose unequal treaties at the expense of China's interests and caused China to forfeit its territorial sovereignty. Foreign concessions were established and land was partitioned. Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain after the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, followed by the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutter's Island after the Convention of Peking in 1860 and

34 “The Yuan, or Mongol, dynasty,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-China/The-Yuan-or-Mongol-dynasty>.

35 Pegolotti's writings can be found in Henry Yule ed., *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Vol III: Mission-ary Friars—Rashiduddin—Pegolotti-Marignolli, Second Series, no. 38 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1914): 134–173, 149.

36 Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo With Notes by Hugh Murray*, 12.

the lease of the New Territories for 99 years from 1898. Hong Kong was a British colony for more than a century and a half (1841–1997).

The First World War (1914–1918) marked a dividing line between the early modernists and their wartime successors. In *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), Roy Bridges details the imperialistic functions of travel writing through the First World War. Bridges argues that the aim of Western travel writings between 1720 and 1914 was "to bring the non-European world into a position where it could be influenced, exploited or, in some cases, directly controlled."³⁷ This imperialist assumption was heightened in order to objectify "the non-European world" through the Western gaze. While the East was a career goal for many, the locals and the Oriental realm should be assessed on the basis of a Eurocentric attitude.

In his study of relationships between travelogues and international relations, Xavier Guillaume confirms the status of "travel writing as one of the central sources for conceptualizing and reflecting on the sociological, political and normative dimensions of the identity/alterity nexus."³⁸ Marco Polo's work led Europeans to perceive China as a domain of political strength and economic wealth. Peter Hulme summarizes how Western travelers who toured other parts of the world after the nineteenth century wrote "with witty non-chalance" about a "turbulent decade."³⁹ From that time onwards, the national image highlighted what Duan calls an "inferior China." The place still offered many opportunities to Europeans, but it may not be the best place for the sons of aristocrats or ambitious travelers and politicians to build long-lasting illustrious careers. In the twentieth century, China was no longer Xanadu but a humble destination for those who were in exile.

Martha Gellhorn's experience in colonial Hong Kong was a double exile: she visited Hong Kong in the early days of the Sino-Japanese War, and she was alienated from both her husband and the local people during her stay. She did not speak Chinese and relied on an outsider angle to examine the East. Her writings deviate greatly from the positive view of the East "as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive."⁴⁰ On February 22, 1941

37 Roy Bridges, "Exploration and Travel Outside Europe (1720–1914)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writings*, eds. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53.

38 Xavier Guillaume, "Travelogues of Difference: IR Theory and Travel Literature," *Alternatives: Global, Local and Political* 36, no. 2 (May 2022): 136.

39 Peter Hulme, "Travelling to Write (1940–2000)," 87.

40 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 187.

the famous newlyweds Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) and Martha Gellhorn (1908–1998) made Hong Kong the first stop of their Asian tour. While the couple were both writers and journalists, their interest in traveling differed. Peter Moreira describes how “the new wife wanted to go to China to see the war against the Japanese” and comments on this wish as “an unusual demand for a bride” but “one perfectly in keeping with Martha Gellhorn’s character.”⁴¹ In her travel writing entitled *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir* (1978), Gellhorn admitted that the trip came about from her concern that the Japanese “would soon start destroying the East as their partners were destroying the West.”⁴² She was sent by *Collier’s* magazine to report on China’s warfront, and she was eager because there were only about a hundred female wartime correspondents during World War II.⁴³

Gellhorn wanted to take her career to the next level with a trip to the East. Her determination to choose a male-dominated profession could have been a result of her mother’s suffragist background. Her mother, Edna Fischel Gellhorn (1878–1970), was a founder of the League of Women Voters. As a young girl, she accompanied her mother in participating in suffragette campaigns.⁴⁴ Having taken up an unusual job for a woman, she aspired to see things from an American, female, outsider, professional point of view. Japanese troops invaded Hong Kong on December 8, 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor the previous day. As Gellhorn went to Hong Kong before the Japanese occupation, her focus was on the lives of ordinary people, and this was totally different from her later coverage of the battlefield in China. This trip satisfied Gellhorn’s wish, but Hemingway was an indifferent travel partner.

In Gellhorn’s memoir, she referred to her husband as “U.C.,” her abbreviation for an “Unwilling Companion.”⁴⁵ According to Stuart Heaver, Hemingway “ironically described this 100-day Asia trip as their ‘honeymoon.’”⁴⁶ This

41 Peter Moreira, *Hemingway on the China Front: His WWII Spy Mission with Martha Gellhorn* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 3.

42 Martha Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir* (London: Eland: 2002), 17.

43 “Martha Gellhorn: Eye Witness to War,” The National WWII Museum, March 9, 2022, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/martha-gellhorn-eyewitness-war>.

44 Nicholas Gilmore, “The Female War Correspondent Who Sneaked into D-Day,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2018/11/the-female-war-correspondent-who-sneaked-into-d-day>.

45 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 18.

46 Stuart Heaver, “In Love and War: a Hong Kong Honeymoon for Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn,” *South China Morning Post Magazine*, February 13, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/books/article/1911950/love-and-war-hong-kong-honeymoon-ernest-hemingway-and>.

honeymoon also concealed the real assignment given to Hemingway by U.S. treasury secretary Henry Morgenthau (1891–1967):⁴⁷

Morgenthau was working to provide financial resources to China to fight the Japanese. But he was suspicious of the amounts of money the Kuomintang was demanding and needed intelligence on where the money was going.⁴⁸

Despite Hemingway's initial claim that he was "prepared to visit China as a journalist," he was happy to take on an "intelligence job."⁴⁹

In *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, Gellhorn acknowledges her limitations as a sojourning journalist, making her one of the "amateur travelers" in the preface of her book. Nevertheless, she attempted to experience the exotic landscape and comprehend local customs by paying attention to all walks of life. Stuart Heaver highlights Gellhorn's and Hemingway's differing interests during their Hong Kong tour:

While the legendary drinker slapped backs and swapped war stories with his new entourage, Gellhorn went out to do some reporting, or "test the pulse of the nation," as Hemingway liked to describe it. She visited the city's markets, opium dens and brothels to report on the squalid social conditions endured by an immigrant population seeking refuge from the ravages of the Sino-Japanese war.⁵⁰

Given her interest in professional journalism, Gellhorn proclaimed that "[she] wanted to see for [her]self, not hear."⁵¹ She was aware of the problem of financial discrepancy between the rich and the poor in the colony, which explained her decision to visit both the affluent and the impoverished parts of the city. In her article "Time Bomb in Hong Kong" published in *Collier's* magazine on June 7, 1941, Gellhorn used both captions and pictures to contrast the luxurious villa of the Eurasian Chinese multi-millionaire Sir Robert Ho Tung 何東 (1862–1956) with the squatter slums of native Hongkongers who struggled for survival.

47 Moreira, *Hemingway on the China Front: His WWII Spy Mission with Martha Gellhorn*, 16–17.

48 Ibid., 18.

49 Ibid., 16, 19.

50 Heaver, "In Love and War: A Hong Kong Honeymoon for Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn."

51 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 22.

Gellhorn's outsider perspective gave her both strengths and weaknesses. In the colonial era, the gap between the two worlds was very much determined by racial, financial, and educational factors. At the top of the hierarchy were the colonial elites, foreign diplomats, industrialists, politicians, and government officials. However, as an outsider, Gellhorn paid relatively little attention to the problem of social stratification. Rather, her attention went to the locals and their everyday life. As a result, she deliberately visited places seldom associated with middle-class American female travelers such as opium dens, mahjong parlors, brothels, and factories.

The weakness is that Gellhorn's choice of destinations may have confirmed the Occidental assumption of the Orient as a poor, backward, trouble-ridden domain. For example, upon his return from China after leading the first British diplomatic mission, Lord George McCartney (1737–1806) commented that the “awesome-appearing country had grave internal weaknesses that threatened to destroy it.”⁵² The opium crisis in the early years of modern China meant that many British had a profitable career thanks to the trade; however, Chinese people were degraded to the point of becoming the “Sick Man of Asia” (東亞病夫). Gellhorn's focus on shadowy parts of the city naturally reinforced westerners' geopolitical discrimination and directed to recall the stereotypical image of Sax Rohmer's villainous fictional character Fu Manchu. James L. Hevia notes that Fu Manchu is not only a crafty “Chinaman” but also the product of a dark exotic world:

These references to race, degradation, gender and conspiracy are, of course, not unusual features of tabloid journalism or the social world of the spectacular that emerged in the imperial centres of Western Europe and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵³

In all fairness, Gellhorn's negative opinion about Hong Kong was modified by her female, compassionate, non-condescending outlook. She experienced culture shock but did not follow the Western tendency to see opium dens as places full of “velvet and gilt and voluptuous sin.”⁵⁴ Instead, she described them as “sad little rooms” where “the coolies smoked opium at ten cents for

52 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 121.

53 James L. Hevia, “The Archive State and the Fear of the Pollution: From the Opium Wars to Fu-Manchu,” *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (1998): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1080/095023898335555>.

54 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 29.

three tiny pills."⁵⁵ Gellhorn was aware that the underclass had little hope in life except escapism, hence she rationally analyzed their reliance on opium as a possible provision of mental relief for their fatigue and pain. Opium "took away the appetite and rested the strained and tired muscles."⁵⁶ Renowned Sinologist Jonathan D. Spence holds a similar view and comments that "the taking of opium derivatives has the effect of slowing down and blurring the world around one, of making time stretch and fade, of shifting complex or painful realities to an apparently infinite distance."⁵⁷ Jason Wordie, a *South China Morning Post* journalist, concludes that Gellhorn was "known for her compassion toward 'the poor' and their suffering in the abstract."⁵⁸

Even though Gellhorn's intention was "to report on the defenses of Hong Kong, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies," her writings about Hong Kong were filled with social rather than political elements.⁵⁹ When Gellhorn followed "her usual way of looking at a society from the bottom rather than from the top," she could not help but adopt the American or outsider's standard and deplored the extreme poverty of Hongkongers:⁶⁰

These people were the real Hong Kong and this was the most cruel poverty, worse than any I had seen before. Worse still because of an air of eternity; life had always been like this, always would be. The sheer numbers, the density of bodies, horrified me. There was no space to breathe, these crushed millions were stifling each other.⁶¹

Even though overcrowding had something to do with the colonial government's housing policy, Gellhorn preferred to steer from political opinions and propaganda. Claire M. Tylee observes how "certain American women war writers tried to avoid being manipulated and the strategies they used to help us readers to focus on the pain and suffering entailed by war."⁶² However, some may

55 Ibid., 29.

56 Ibid., 29.

57 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 129.

58 Jason Wordie, "Then and Now: In Search of Color," *South China Morning Post Magazine*, July 28, 2013, https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1290382/then-now-search-colour?module=perpetual_scroll_o&pgtype=article&campaign=1290382.

59 Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press: 1988), 69.

60 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 29.

61 Ibid., 30.

62 Claire M. Tylee, "Review of *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*, by Jean Gallagher," *South Atlantic Review* 64, no. 4 (1999): 188, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3201528>.

argue that it is problematic for a writer to offer social critique without getting to the bottom of the matter. Franz Fanon argues that imperialist exploitation was the source of colonial hardship. He remarks that “[i]f working conditions are not modified it will take centuries to humanize this world which the imperialist forces have reduced to the animal level.”⁶³

Gellhorn's writings about ivory craftsmanship also highlight her negative view of Hong Kong. While she covertly blamed the colonizers, her focus was on the suffering and exploited state of child laborers:

Hunting and the ability to profit from it also became an important lure for settlers, whom the colonizing powers wanted to attract as another cost-effective way of reaping economic rewards from occupation.⁶⁴

The British hunted elsewhere to provide ivory, but the factories in Hong Kong turned ivory into highly commodifiable artifacts. Gellhorn noticed that “small children carved ivory balls within balls” as they worked in “a dark ill-lit basement factory.” Gellhorn was worried: “[t]hey’ll be blind before they’re twenty.”⁶⁵ She was appalled that her “favorite tourist trinket” was made by children, hence she exclaimed that “[w]e’re all living on slave labour!”⁶⁶

Gellhorn's negative view of Hong Kong did not lead her to envision any political change or cultural reform. As a sojourner, she aimed at a short stay and left the unhappy locals to their fate. To escape from the suffering of the average Hongkonger, she and Hemingway moved to the Repulse Bay Hotel, which was famous for its high-end service and scenic views. During its 1920's grand opening, the hotel propagandized the Repulse Bay as “Menton of the East” owing to its association with the sublime nature and idyllic setting of the French Riviera.⁶⁷ In spite of Gellhorn's feelings for the poor, she would rather side with the rich. Though Hemingway “teased” her “contentment in this clean non-Oriental enclave,”⁶⁸ she found the hotel a comfort zone because the place was “as near English as possible.”⁶⁹ At the end of the day, she published a book on Hong Kong to advance her career: she had the heart to feel for the other but

63 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 57.

64 Keith Somerville, *Ivory: Power and Poaching in Africa* (London: Hurst and Co., 2016), 25.

65 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 30.

66 *Ibid.*, 30.

67 Koon-yiu Ma 馬冠堯, *Cheshui malong: Xianggang zhanqian lushing jiaotong* 車水馬龍：香港戰前陸上交通 [Hustle and Bustle of City Traffic: Land Transport in Pre-War Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2016), 211.

68 *Ibid.*, 31.

69 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

also negated different aspects of the other. The other is only accepted when the other resembles the self.

Gellhorn aspired to present a realistic picture of Hong Kong, but her orientalist gaze was filtered through American or Western stereotypes, and her writings fit the West's fantasy of China. Robert J.C. Young notes that "[c]ivilization was fundamentally a comparative concept."⁷⁰ Gellhorn tried to come up with an original, down-to-earth understanding of Hong Kong, but her discourse of negative orientalism follows the formula of Western mainstream media. In other words, her impression of Hong Kong was filtered through the post-card picture of a "sampan," and Hong Kong "looked like picturesque China in the movies."⁷¹ At the same time, Hong Kong was an underdeveloped and uncomfortable place. Her representation of Hong Kong could thus only reinforce existing Western fantasies and ideologies and heighten orientalist prejudice. Though she wrote about the marginalized other and the poor, this otherness or marginality was the core element in the westernized myth of China. Gregory B. Lee therefore formulates the Chinese space as an empty space:

This Chinese space, this space that calls itself Chinese and yet is located in an English village, the global village. This Chinese space is empty of meaning, of the capacity to communicate, except for a visual communication, a spatial and temporal window, the Western-medium painting of a Chinese landscape.⁷²

The moment Gellhorn is confronted with the radical other or the "real Hong-kong," she admits she "can't stand" or understand it.⁷³ As a result, she came to argue that "the Orient was across the world from what [she] loved and feared for."⁷⁴ Still, we should appreciate Gellhorn's attempt at reaching out to the underclass and revealing people's sorrows.

On a different note, the Irish dramatist and Nobel winner George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) also visited Hong Kong in 1933 and opted for a different travel experience. Following the Japanese advancement into Manchuria, China was politically unstable. Jason Wordie observed the impact of the arrival of Shaw on 11 February 1933. In his words, the literary celebrity "generated a substantial

⁷⁰ Robert, J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 32.

⁷¹ Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 31.

⁷² Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness*, 13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁴ Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, 69.

local stir.”⁷⁵ In spite of Shaw’s manifest leftist sentiments, his visit to Hong Kong was limited to meeting illustrious people and delivering speeches to the ruling elites.

Gellhorn was aware of the discriminated status of the underprivileged in Hong Kong, but Shaw only networked with the rich and famous. Escorted by R.K.M. Simpson, the Professor of English and Dean of Arts at the University of Hong Kong, Shaw visited Sir Robert Ho Tung. The multi-millionaire greeted him in one of his luxurious residences named “Idlewild” on Seymour Road, a prestigious location in the city. When Shaw visited the 125,000-square-foot villa, he formulated an idea of Hong Kong culture in accordance with Western aesthetics:

It was a radiant miniature temple with an altar with a Chinese vermilion and gold, and cushioned divan seats round the walls for the worshippers. Everything was in such perfect Chinese taste that to sit there and look was a quiet delight.⁷⁶

This grand, sanitized, and aestheticized Chinese taste seems to have had a mesmerizing effect on Shaw. He included a temple in his later play *Buoyant Billions* (1948), and this may help explain why the East also helped advance Shaw’s career in later years.⁷⁷

In contrast, Hemingway had an unfiltered, condescending, non-political attitude. Hemingway was noted for his (toxic) masculinity, hence he wrote to Gellhorn’s mother without mentioning his inadequate role as a travel companion. He noted that “M[artha] is very happy [in Hong Kong], treating the men like brothers and the women like dogs.”⁷⁸ He intuited that Martha’s kindness to local women could only mimic a person’s kindness to pets. He also criticized Gellhorn for applying American standards to the Hong Kong situation of overcrowding. His indifference to his wife’s view and to the locals hints at his belief that the other should be left to themselves. Gellhorn at least tried to comprehend “what they feel about their lives.”⁷⁹

75 Jason Wordie, “Then and Now: Get Me Out of Here,” *South China Morning Post Magazine*, July 2, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1521091/then-now-get-me-out-here>.

76 Piers Gray, “Hong Kong, Shanghai, The Great Wall: Bernard Shaw in China,” *Shaw Abroad* 5 (1985): 213, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40681158?seq=1>.

77 Kay Li, “Hong Kong in ‘Buoyant Billions’: The Exotic in Bernard Shaw,” *Shaw* 15 (1995): 57–62.

78 Gellhorn, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, 29.

79 *Ibid.*, 30.

On a final note, *Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir*, was written in 1978 when Gellhorn was 70. By then, she had to adjust her (negative) attitude due to the much improved situation in Hong Kong in the late 1970s, which had a population of 4.6 million. The land area of Hong Kong is about 1,115 square kilometers, and it only had a population of around 1.6 million at the time of her 1941 visit:

Hongkong bore no resemblance to the present city as seen on TV, a forest of skyscrapers [...]. When we saw it, the working city of Hongkong at the base of the Peak looked as if nailed together hurriedly from odd lots of old wood ... It was brilliant with colors in signs and pennants, the narrow streets were jammed by rickshaws, bicycles, people, but not cars; the highest building was an imposing square bank and it wasn't very high.⁸⁰

All in all, I argue that positive and negative orientalism had different dimensions and impacts. Orientalists could build a career by positioning China and Hong Kong positively or negatively, and their views could be biased or could change due to external circumstances. Local citizens usually prefer foreign travelers to like them and give a positive portrayal of the place, but foreign writers may have different (possibly hidden) agendas and formulas to follow. Instead of being confined by the "East/West," "insider/outsider," "superior/inferior" framework, I propose that it would be a good idea to see that all orientalists and oriental discourses are products of time and history and examine how orientalists were themselves over-determined by various factors such as economic incentives, political motivations, personal longings, and social and cultural prejudices. The self may never become the other and vice versa, but peaceful co-existence may be achievable when people understand that all humans are born unfree and flawed and bounded by the government and the environment.

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80 Ibid., 21.

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Ann Hui on the Shores of the South China Sea

Jim Cocola

1 Introduction

Premiering in 1982, Ann Hui's 許鞍華 *Boat People* (《投奔怒海》) made waves on the international film circuit only to find itself banned in Taiwan and all across China.¹ This Hong Kong film made by a half-Japanese director, shot in China, and set in Vietnam presents several epistemological and ontological complications about Hong Kong cinema, which emerged as a signal node of world cinema during the Cold War.² Wondering how and where Hong Kong cinema and media might be located, Victor Fan described the very question as “a perturbation,” acknowledging that the task of “defining Hong Kong cinema has always been a precarious problem” and postulating even while finding it necessary to “hesitate to coin the term *extraterritorial cinema*” in relationship to Hong Kong's rich and varied film history.³ What might seem a mere matter of Hong Kong cinema is rarely only that, with the film sketched above and detailed below also having a place in British, Chinese, French, Japanese, and Vietnamese film histories—a consummate instance of world cinema.

To general audiences, Hong Kong cinema strikes particularly recognizable chords in the auteurist films of Wong Kar-wai 王家衛 (b.1958), the action films of Jackie Chan 成龍 (b.1954), Johnnie To 杜琪峯 (b.1955), and John Woo 吳宇森 (b.1946), and the *wuxia* (martial arts 武俠) films of Chang Cheh 張徹 (1923–2002) and Tsui Hark 徐克 (b.1951). Alongside these men, Hui has only begun to garner her full due despite—or perhaps because of—her transformative role in bridging the divide between Hong Kong and Beijing. Over a career spanning nearly half-a-century, Hui has solidified her place as a key female director in the history of world cinema, emerging as the most decorated female director in the Asian Cinema 100 rankings at the Busan International Film Festival of 2015

¹ *Boat People* was finally released in Taiwan in May 2023.

² I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who further elucidated this complexity in their incisive comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

³ Victor Fan, *Extraterritoriality: Locating Hong Kong Cinema and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1, 5, 14.

and more recently distinguished by the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival in 2020.

Among Hui's films, *Boat People*, more literally translated as *Into the Raging Sea*, holds a pivotal place in the history of Hong Kong, Sinophone, and indeed pan-Asian cinema. Made the very year Ackbar Abbas singled out—following Gilles Deleuze—as the moment when Hong Kong cinema became modern, *Boat People* stands as a touchstone work, exemplifying Abbas's notion of a new cinema that “responds to a specific and unprecedented historical situation,” a history that “goes through strange loops and becomes difficult to represent in terms of traditional realism” so that, with “real history ... becoming more incredible by the day,” filmmakers “resort to the incredible to keep up with it.”⁴ The first film produced in cooperation between a Hong Kong director and the People's Republic of China, *Boat People* evokes the fractures, reunifications, and traumas of twentieth-century Vietnam as a way of obliquely invoking the fractures, reunifications, and traumas of twentieth-century China. Set primarily in central Vietnam but filmed on location on the southern Chinese littoral, *Boat People* also articulates to Hui's Hong Kong, evoking various locations on the shores of the South China Sea.

2 The Geopolitics of Ann Hui's *Boat People*

The following geocritical and phenomenological reading of the film attempts to clarify the stakes of Hui's complex cinematic errand. Because *Boat People* baroquely invokes American, British, Chinese, French, Japanese, and Vietnamese histories, walking a careful line between the documentary and the dramatic, the tangled territorial dimensions of *Boat People* can be clarified when the film is re-centered on the South China Sea. Set in Da Nang, a coastal city in Central Vietnam, the film was in fact shot in coastal Chinese locales including the island of Hainan (海南) and the nearby city of Zhanjiang (湛江).⁵ What Hainan and Zhanjiang have in common with one another and with Da Nang—not to mention Hong Kong—is that each stands as a key locale on the rim of the South China Sea. Because the urban scenes that represent the postcolonial

4 Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 16–17. On gradual modernities in cinema “around 1948, Italy,—about 1958, France,—about 1968, Germany,” see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 211.

5 Under French colonialism, Da Nang was known as Tourane, Central Vietnam was known as Annam (1883–1954), and Zhanjiang was known as Tsamkong (1898–1943).

city of Da Nang in the film's diegesis are actually photographs of the postcolonial city of Zhanjiang, and because the rural scenes that represent Vietnamese Special Economic Zones in the film's diegesis are in fact photographs of Hainan, a once and future Chinese Special Economic Zone, Hui manages to blur an overt but externalized commentary on the state of contemporary Vietnam with an implicit and internalized commentary on the state of contemporary China, finally synthesizing this double vision in the waters of the South China Sea, which borders the Chinese and Vietnamese coasts alike.

In reading Hui's *Boat People* along the shores of the South China Sea, I employ one of Bertrand Westphal's key "methodological tenets of geocriticism," namely, the "multifocalization of views on a given referential space."⁶ As such, any of the film's diegetic views of Da Nang, in Vietnam, must simultaneously be understood as a documentary view of Hainan and Zhanjiang, as well as an allegorical view of Hong Kong. As part of this triple attention, I pursue "geocriticism's first objective," which for Westphal is "to address the issues associated with the aesthetic representations of space and places that are invested in the threshold that spreads out between the real and the fictional."⁷

With these multifocalizations and thresholds in mind, Hui's *Boat People* can be read as an instance of metacinema, recently defined by David LaRocca as "work that either refers to genre conventions or to itself" and "trades on the potencies of citation and allusion (a gesture that looks outward from the text at hand to some other source or frame of reference), or folds back upon itself (making its very existence an issue)" so that "there is telescoping in both cases: to distant reference points, in the first scenario; to internal ones in the second," dynamics which "often lead to doubling."⁸ In *Boat People*, Hui doubles and redoubles via fictional ciphers even as her on-location shots double with their diegetic sites.

Arguing that "the 'reality' in *Boat People* is of course fictional," Ka-Fai Yau underscores the film's production of "reality brought to the audience by way of a disillusioning mode of presentation that is aware of its own illusive nature."⁹ While fictional, disillusioning, and illusive strategies play a central role in the

6 Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, translated by Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 114.

7 Bertrand Westphal, "A Geocritical Approach to Geocriticism," *American Book Review* 37, no. 6 (2016): 4.

8 David LaRocca, "Introduction: An Invitation to the Varieties and Virtues of 'Meta-ness' in the Art and Culture of Film," in *Metacinema: The Form and Content of Filmic Reference and Reflexivity*, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3.

9 Ka-Fai Yau, "Looking Back at Ann Hui's Cinema of the Political," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 19, no. 2 (2007): 128.

film, they should not obscure the documentary strategy by which Hui gained authorization to reveal actual photographs of China in the process of pretending to reveal Vietnam. On the one hand, what seems to be Da Nang is not Da Nang, and what seems to be the Vietnamese countryside is not the Vietnamese countryside; on the other hand, the illusory Vietnam that results on screen comes into being only through Hui's depictions of an actual China still largely closed in the early 1980s to the outside world.

Born in Manchuria to a Japanese mother and a Chinese father in 1946, shortly after the Japanese withdrawal from Manchukuo (滿洲國), Hui arrived in British Hong Kong in the 1960s on the heels of an estimated 1.5 million refugees who sought safe harbor there in the period between 1945 and 1960, first fleeing the Chinese Civil War and later the People's Republic of China. This mass migration affected several prominent filmmakers of the generation before Hui, including exiled Shanghai directors Fei Mu 費穆 (1906–1951) and Zhu Shilin 朱石麟 (1899–1967), with Fei's *Spring in a Small Town* (《小城之春》, 1948) and Zhu's *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (《清宮秘史》, 1948) confronting contemporary Chinese society through the prism of the recent past, with both films completed and released just as the People's Republic of China was coming into being.

While many refugees to Hong Kong “sneaked across the short land border the colony shared with neighboring Shenzhen,” the vast majority “came by water, swimming, often clinging to inner tubes or pieces of wood, or hidden in boats.”¹⁰ A decade after this initial wave subsided, in the 1970s, refugees coalesced again, when, “in the seventies, Hong Kong faced an influx of an estimated 213,000 Vietnamese fleeing their civil war in rickety wooden junks.”¹¹ Thus, every boat person seeking refuge from Vietnam in Hong Kong brought with them the trace of another seven who had previously sought refuge from China in Hong Kong. With this in mind, acknowledging Hui's “metacinematic attention,” Yau argues that while *Boat People* “does not have an obvious allegorical structure” its “self-referentiality might induce a Hong Kong audience to read the film allegorically and associate Vietnam with their own precarious historical and political situation.”¹² Turning not only on history and politics, Hui's allegory also depends crucially on a congeries of geographical

10 Mark L. Clifford, *Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow the World: What China's Crackdown Reveals About Its Plans to End Freedom Everywhere* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2022), 82.

11 Louisa Lim, *Indelible City: Dispossession and Defiance in Hong Kong* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2022), 99–100.

12 Yau, “Looking Back,” 130. For a competing view that acknowledges the usefulness of allegorical readings but also emphasizes the everydayness of women's lives in Hui's films, see Mirana M. Szeto, “Ann Hui at the Margin of Mainstream Hong Kong Cinema,” in *Hong*

particulars, offering a singular instance among her “allegorical critiques of local geopolitics.” In viewing her career thus, Jessica Siu-yin Yeung holds that Hui’s films “consistently emphasize either a particular mainland Chinese or a specific Hong Kong historical period,” but *Boat People*, uniquely, turns to Vietnam in order to reflect on China and Hong Kong together.¹³

As Po-Shek Fu has argued, “the cinematic Cold War was, by definition, border-crossing because of the commercial and political imperatives to connect with overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.”¹⁴ More recently, Fu has positioned the Hong Kong New Wave of the late 1970s and early 1980s—including early efforts by Hark, Hui, and Woo, as well as in films like Allen Fong’s 方育平 *Father and Son* (《父子情》, 1981) and Yim Ho’s 嚴浩 *Homecoming* (《似水流年》, 1984)—as a movement enshrining “the birth of local consciousness” in Hong Kong cinema, less given over to the thrall of imperial or national identifications than to the immediacy of urban contexts.¹⁵ This peculiar combination of inveterate border crossing and unreconstructed localism finds particular purchase in Hui’s *Boat People*, which crosses borders, real and imagined, evoking localities directly photographed, explicitly referenced, and only indirectly suggested. A local film indirectly about Hong Kong, it never mentions or pictures but only ultimately points toward that signal city.

Produced by Xia Meng’s 夏夢 Bluebird Movie Enterprises Limited (青島電影製片有限公司), *Boat People* emerged in collaboration with the Chinese government, which permitted its filming on Hainan Island (海南島).¹⁶ Half-Japanese and born in Manchuria, Hui’s journey to Hainan to film *Boat People* presents a resonant geographical echo, bringing her back to territory formerly occupied by the Japanese empire at its high-water mark.¹⁷ Although

Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier, eds. Esther M. K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, See-Kam Tan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 51–66.

- 13 Jessica Siu-yin Yeung, “Ann Hui’s Allegorical Cinema,” in *Cultural Conflict in Hong Kong: Angles on a Coherent Imaginary*, eds. Jason S. Polley, Vinton W. K. Poon, and Lian-Hee Wee (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 88.
- 14 Poshek Fu, “Hong Kong Cinema and Asia’s Cold War,” in *The Cold War and Asian Cinemas*, edited by Poshek Fu and Man-Fung Yip (New York: Routledge, 2019), 259.
- 15 Po-Shek Fu, *Hong Kong Media and Asia’s Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 171.
- 16 On the role of Xia Meng, also known as Hsia Moon, in producing Hui’s *Boat People*, as well as, Mou Tun-fei’s 牟敦芾 *Little Heroes* (《自古英雄出少年》, 1983) and Yim Ho’s 嚴浩 *Homecoming* (《似水流年》, 1984), see Ying Xiao, “Homecoming, Border-Crossing, and Conjuncture Film: Hsia Moon, Hong Kong New Wave, and the Bluebird Trilogy, 1982–1984,” *JCMS* 63, no.1 (Fall 2023): 150–173.
- 17 For more on this wartime history, see R. T. Phillips, “The Japanese Occupation of Hainan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1980): 93–109.

the film was made under the alternate title *Return to Da Nang*, it may also be understood in a biographical sense as a return to formerly Japanese-occupied China. The censures, ruptures, and tribulations that mark the film's diegesis also extended to its production: as the mainland producer Wei Junzi 魏君子 (b. 1978) has noted, "due to the political sensitivity of *Boat People*, Ann Hui had no movies to make in the future, so Shaw Brothers invited her to sign a contract" (影片中的政治敏感令許鞍華之後沒有電影可拍，邵氏遂邀她簽約), eventually launching her on an even more highly visible career in world cinema.¹⁸

Once a girl finding herself launched on a tenuous journey from Northeast-China to Hong Kong, Hui relived that journey twice in making *Boat People*. In diegetic terms, she traced her gravitation to Hong Kong through the figure of Cam Nuong 琴娘 (portrayed by Season Ma 馬斯晨), who finds herself launched on a tenuous journey in the South China Sea at film's end. Perhaps implicitly en route to Hong Kong, this journey alternately or simultaneously reads as that of a Vietnamese refugee and/or a Chinese refugee. Meanwhile, in directorial terms, as a Hong Kong filmmaker in her thirties shooting on location in Hainan, Hui shifted her work from a waning British colony to a one-time Japanese colony, with Hong Kong poised to devolve to China and Hainan long since having done so.

Another tenuous journey in *Boat People* comes in the attempts of Japanese photojournalist Shiomi Akutagawa 芥川汐見 (portrayed by George Lam 林子祥) to capture the realities of postwar Vietnam on film. A visual artist who runs the risk of alienating the Vietnamese authorities, he too can be read as a cipher for Hui, a half-Japanese filmmaker running the risk of alienating the Chinese authorities.¹⁹ The mere suggestion of identifying with a Japanese hero—in this case, more of an ambivalent hero, if not an anti-hero—came with certain risks for Hui and even bigger risks for her actors. As she noted, the part of To Minh 祖明, which finally went to Andy Lau 劉德華, had been designed for established Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat 周潤發, who refused the part because

18 See Wei Junzi 魏君子, *Guāngyǐng lǐ de lànghuā: Xiānggǎng diànyǐng mǎilù huíyì* 光影裏的浪花：香港電影脈絡回憶 [Waves in Light and Shadow: Memories of Hong Kong Film Context] (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2019), 490.

19 The Akutagawa surname alludes to Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927), the namesake of Japan's top literary prize and author of the short stories "Rashōmon" (1915) and "In a Grove" (1922). The latter, turning on the multi-focalization of disparate perspectives on a recent death, formed the main basis for Akira Kurosawa's 黑澤明 film adaptation *Rashōmon* (《羅生門》, 1950).

of its on-location filming on Hainan Island, for fear of “being blacklisted” and “banned from Taiwan” in consequence.²⁰

In short order, *Boat People* was contested and suppressed by various European and Asian authorities alike. A premiere in the main competition at Cannes was scuttled for fear of poisoning French-Vietnamese relations, and the film was reduced to “the most highly classified film surprise”²¹ in the festival’s history, with the tension surrounding its debut remarkably captured in Hubert Piernet’s 1983 documentary of *Conference de Presse Boat People Sans Journalistes* [Boat People at Cannes], where Hui and Lam cautiously fielded questions in English alongside a French translator whose differing sense of the stakes of the event proved a source of acute anxiety. Thereafter, as Audrey Yue recounts, the film was “initially banned in Taiwan, taken out of distribution in Hong Kong, and eventually banned in China,” not to mention its ambivalent reception in Japan and non-reception in Vietnam. While Yue reads this history as a consequence of the film’s “anti-communist stance,”²² Hui herself has argued that the film is “not anti-communist” and “not a propaganda statement against communism.”²³

Indeed, insofar as the film was produced under the aegis of the Chinese central government, which approved the script, supplied extras, props, and minor roles and granted permission for on-location shooting, it might be understood as an early attempt toward the eventual realization of a globalizing China’s influence in the register of world cinema. The politics of the film’s production would seem less concerned with communist ideology per se—having tacitly endorsed communism in submitting to its imprimatur—than with realpolitik in the South China Sea, with one eye on an internecine border dispute between China and Vietnam, another on coalescing Chinese irredentism toward British Hong Kong.

Politically fraught, poised between competing British and Chinese claims, Hong Kong has been a crucible of film censorship for over a century. The first feature film made there, Li Beihai’s 黎北海 *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife* (《莊子試妻》, 1913), was not permitted a local screening, and premiered instead in the Chinatowns of Los Angeles and San Francisco. From there, the British took an active role in the censorship of Hong Kong cinema and Hong Kong culture more generally, and during the violent anticolonial protest year of

20 Quoted in Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 429.

21 Harlan Kennedy, “Boat People,” *Film Comment* 19, no.5 (1983): 41.

22 Audrey Yue, *Ann Hui’s Song of the Exile* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 10–11.

23 Quoted in Kennedy, “Boat People,” 41.

1926, the British banned film and theater activity entirely.²⁴ While the British subsequently formalized political censorship of films in Hong Kong with the Film Censorship Regulations of 1953, Michael Ng observes that “the public was unaware of how these principles were applied and interpreted until 1973, when censorship guidelines were published.”²⁵

Broadcast television did not reach the city until 1967, and even as the media landscape began to open up, veiled allegory remained the sole recourse for a largely “politically neutered” Hong Kong film industry.²⁶ Commentary on the leftist riots of 1967 adjacent to the Cultural Revolution of the later 1960s could only reach the screen in the form of a baroque plague narrative, which Lung Kong’s 龍剛 *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (《昨天今天明天》, 1970) employed to encrypt this fraught historical moment. Politics, and history more generally, were not meant for everyday Hongkongers until quite recently: as Mark Clifford observes, compulsory education did not emerge until 1971, with a provision for “just three years of primary education.”²⁷ Even then, as Louisa Lim points out, “Hong Kong history was not taught in Hong Kong schools between the mid-1970s and the 1990s.”²⁸

Correspondingly, China’s censorious relationship to film and culture has also been apparent in myriad ways, from Mao Zedong’s criticism and suppression of Sun Yu’s 孫瑜 *The Life of Wu Xun* (《武訓傳》, 1951) to the more recent removal of Zhang Yimou’s 張藝謀 *One Second* (《一秒鐘》, 2020) from the 2019 Berlinale. As Beijing’s sphere of influence began to broaden during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mandarin became a rising and eventually leading language of Hong Kong cinema, fueled at once by market forces and state imperatives. Yet by the middle 1970s, with films such as Chor Yuen’s 楚原 *The House of 72 Tenants* (《七十二家房客》, 1973) and Michael Hui’s 許冠文 *Games Gamblers Play* (《鬼馬雙星》, 1974), the trend began to reverse, with Cantonese-language films restored to pride of place.²⁹

24 On the Hong Kong violence of 1926 and the resulting British ban on film production in the city, see C. T. Yang, *The World Turned Upside Down: A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, translated by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 156.

25 Michael Ng, *Political Censorship in British Hong Kong: Freedom of Expression and the Law (1842–1997)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 112.

26 Tom Cunliffe, “Lung Kong’s *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*: The 1967 Riots and the Politics of Cultural Production in the Hong Kong Film Industry,” *Screen* 61, no. 1 (2020): 47.

27 Clifford, *Today Hong Kong*, 71.

28 Lim, *Indelible City*, 69–70.

29 Clifford reads recent Chinese censorship of the Hong Kong film industry as a push that effectively reflects earlier moves of this sort by British authorities. See Clifford, *Today Hong Kong*, 41.

Whether in Cantonese or in Mandarin, how did *Boat People* slide past the British and Chinese censors and end up being made? One clue suggests itself in terms outlined in an earlier set of British codifications for film censorship in Hong Kong from 1950, which prohibited “anything which is liable to prejudice unfavorably relations with friendly powers.”³⁰ The key term here is “friendly.” In the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the Vietnamese communist revolution, Britain under Margaret Thatcher was not on particularly friendly terms with Vietnam. Neither for its part was China, having recently fought the Sino-Vietnamese War in early 1979 over an inconclusive border dispute in a bid to deter Vietnam from further inroads into Cambodia and to assert further influence in Southeast Asia and beyond.³¹ Against the odds, these hostilities were sufficient to propel Hui’s *Boat People* into being even if this momentum proved insufficient to keep the film in broad circulation.

In Taiwan, condemnation of the film emerged shortly after its release and withdrawal, in a 1984 article in the journal *Literary Forum* (《文壇》), where Cháo Fù 巢父 offered a strenuous critique of Hui’s *Boat People*, taken alongside Yigong Wu’s 吳貽弓 *My Memories of Old Beijing* (《城南舊事》, 1983), a film adaptation of Lin Hay-Yin’s 林海音 1960 novel of the same name. Framing Hui from the outset in scare quotes as a “film ‘talent’” (電影「人才」), Cháo implicitly dismissed the position that “politics is politics, art is art” (政治歸政治、藝術歸藝術), condemning the geographical sleight of hand in *Boat People* that would render China as Vietnam, and conversely, Vietnam as China, concluding that “the film is a plagiarized counterfeit” (這部影片亦是抄襲的仿冒品).³² To the view that *Boat People* represented an “anti-Vietnam film” (反越片), Cháo argued that this did not comport with the subsequent halting of the film’s release. Ultimately, Cháo recognized only to dismiss Hui’s artistic achievement, acknowledging that “*Boat People* can be seen as one of the more carefully shot films produced in recent Hong Kong, but not all carefully shot

30 Quoted in Kenny K. K. Ng, “Inhibition vs. Exhibition: Political Censorship of Chinese and Foreign Cinemas in Postwar Hong Kong,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no. 1 (2008): 27.

31 For more on the Sino-Vietnamese War, prosecuted by a China whose “objectives were regional and global,” with an eye not only on Cambodia and Vietnam but also on the Soviet Union and the United States, see Daniel Trethick, “China’s Vietnam War and its Consequences,” *China Quarterly* 80 (December 1979): 753.

32 Cháo Fù 巢父, “政治歸政治、藝術歸藝術？——談「投奔怒海」和「城南舊事」兩部電影 [Politics is Politics, Art is Art?—Discussion of the Two Films *Boat People* and *My Memories of Old Beijing*],” *Wéntán* 文壇 [Literary Forum] 291 (September 1984): 29.

films are good works” (投奔怒海看得出是近期香港製作電影之中，較用心拍攝的一部，但并非凡屬用心攝製的電影都是佳作).³³

Even Hui's sharpest detractors acknowledged her artistic merits, but the devil was in the details. Due to the circumstances of its production, *Boat People* possessed a certain geopolitical fungibility that simultaneously amplified its ideological palatability and its propensity for giving offense: if the film could be supported from many different angles, it could be decried from many different angles as well. Upon closer examination, a further clue to the summary withdrawal of *Boat People* from circulation can be found in the contours of its initial promotional campaign. Also writing in 1984, from Hong Kong, Ai Fan 艾凡 acknowledged that he “had not watched this film yet” (我還未看過這部戲), focusing instead on the fact that “the words in the movie’s advertisement are ‘Give me freedom or give me death, and survive in the angry sea!’ ‘Only for Hong Kong people, a must-see; the truth of the revolution, boldly exposed!’” (電影廣告的字眼，「不自由，毋寧死，怒海求生！」「大限港人，千萬必看；革命真相，大膽暴露！」)³⁴. The rhetorical stakes of this promotional language suggest an American sphere of influence, echoing a famous quote attributed to Patrick Henry in a 1775 speech delivered on the eve of the American Revolution. But the “truth of the revolution” (革命真相) was harder to trace: which revolution? The American? The Chinese? The French? The Vietnamese? All of the above?

At any rate, with Hong Kong more fully secured in its return from British to Chinese authority, *Boat People* re-emerged as one of several films screened at the 1997 Hong Kong Film Festival as part of a series called “I Have a Date With the Censors.” These films had a common fate in censorship under British rule in Hong Kong, with Hui’s film—uniquely censored by the British and the Chinese alike—standing alongside Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and Akira Kurosawa’s *Dersu Uzala* (1975). Having been “officially censored because of ‘gorily depicted material,’” the violent depictions of *Boat People* came cheek-by-jowl with historical truths seldom disclosed in English.³⁵ Like Akutagawa, Cam Nuong announces that her father was killed by American

33 Ibid., 35.

34 Ai Fan 艾凡, 港人治港, 行! [Hong Kong People Govern Hong Kong, Okay!] (Hong Kong: Guangjiǎojìng chūbǎn shè, 1984), 77.

35 Ilaria Maria Sala, “Cinema in Hong Kong: Censorship and the Market: How to Live With Them Both,” *China Perspectives* 12 (1997): 84. For accounts of the 1997 Hong Kong Film Festival and its disposition toward censorship, see Kees Kuiken, “Hong Kong and Macau,” in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. Derek Jones (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1100 and Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 214.

planes: his family in the Pacific Theater of War of the 1940s, and her father in U.S. Air Force operations in Vietnam during the 1970s.

Films such as *The Battle of Algiers*, *Dersu Uzala*, and *Boat People* demand intricate analyses in part because of their geographical complexities: shot on location, straddling colonial and national boundaries, and suffused with diasporic consciousness and wartime division. In Hui's case, such geographic complexities function to compound Audrey Yue's identification of "diasporic Chineseness as a heterogeneous force for the representation, contestation, and articulation of disparate Chinese identities."³⁶ Hui further underscores heterogeneity in *Boat People* through recourse to her characteristic strategy, identified by Pak Tong Cheuk as "narrative structures that evolve from multiple points of view to multiple layers of time and space intertwining with each other."³⁷

These complexities can be untangled in part through the framework of geocriticism, articulated by Robert T. Tally, Jr. as an interpretative mode "geared toward understanding the ways in which narratives represented, shaped, and influenced social spaces ... with a heightened sensitivity to spatial relations as well as to place and to mapping in and around the texts under consideration."³⁸ In considering films informed by imperial contests involving Algeria and France—or China, Japan, and Russia—or Britain, China, France, the United States, and Vietnam—geocriticism helps to further situate and in turn elucidate such texts. The spatial practices of *Boat People* take place in a fictionalized Vietnam, in an actual China, with Hong Kong funding, and in all three cases all around the South China Sea.

Untangling the web of geographical implication Hui weaves in *Boat People* requires closer attention to her key sites for on-location shooting, Hainan and Zhanjiang, which sheds further light on the allegorical structure of the film, revealing additional nuances in the doublings that structure this key work of metacinema. Hainan presents a particularly consequential site for consideration in this regard. As Edyta Roszko notes, the island "has long been outside effective Chinese control, being inhabited by different groups such as the Cham, a maritime and mobile people who, through trade, connected China and Southeast Asia with the Arab world."³⁹ At the same time, both Hainan and Hong Kong have been crucial to Chinese projections of power in the region.

36 Yue, *Ann Hui's Song of the Exile*, 15–16.

37 Pak Tong Cheuk, *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978–2000)* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 55.

38 Robert T. Tally, Jr., "Introduction to Focus: Situating Geocriticism," *American Book Review* 37, no.6 (September/October 2016): 3.

39 Edyta Roszko, "Fishers and Territorial Anxieties in China and Vietnam: Narratives of the South China Sea Beyond the Frame of the Nation," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 6, no. 1 (2017): 34.

As François Lafargue notes, Hainan presents “une pièce essentielle pour permettre à Pékin de s’assurer le contrôle de la mer de Chine” (an essential piece allowing Beijing to secure control of the South China Sea).⁴⁰

Only slightly smaller than Taiwan, roughly the size of Belgium, and today boasting twice the population of New Zealand, when Hui filmed on the island, Hainan was transforming itself from a peripheral but pivotal backwater to a tourist mecca. During the 1960s and 1970s, “because of its location,” Hainan “posed security dangers to the Chinese,” and was “a volatile place, with large numbers of sent-down youth, demobilized soldiers, and the presence of Li and Miao minority nationality groups” proving “generally hostile to the Han Chinese, who in turn thought of the Li and Miao as backward savages.”⁴¹ In this regard, filming a postwar drama on location in Hainan offered an opportunity to project and further consolidate Chinese power on the island.

Filming on Hainan also allowed for the conjuring of a key intertext, namely “the Cultural Revolution ‘model work’ *The Red Detachment of Women* [《紅色娘子軍》],” which, “in both its ballet and Peking opera forms, grew out of the famous 1961 feature film directed by Xie Jin [謝晉].”⁴² The film built on local sources to develop a plot

centered on a young slave girl in tropical Hainan Island named Wu Qionghua, who escapes from brutal servitude during the 1930s with the help of a male local Party representative, Hong Changqing, and finds refuge in a Red Army base, where she joins a detachment of female fighters, becomes a loyal party member, and learns that collective action is more effective than individual revenge in vanquishing the local tyrant and his Nationalist cronies.⁴³

A further intertextual connection suggests itself in Cai Chusheng 蔡楚王 and Wang Weiyi’s 王爲一 *Waves on the Southern Shore* (《南海潮》, 1962), also known in English as *Waves on the South China Sea*, whose parallel plot pivots on the plight of a family of boat people, centered particularly on a young girl

40 François Lafargue, “Hainan, l’île mystérieuse,” *Diplomatie* 93 (July – August 2018): 12.

41 B. Michael Frolic, *Mao’s People: Sixteen Portraits of Life in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 196.

42 Kristine Harris, “Re-makes/Re-models: *The Red Detachment of Women* between Stage and Screen,” *Opera Quarterly* 26 no. 2 (2010): 317.

43 Harris, “Re-makes/Re-models,” 317. For more on the British censoring of Xie Jin’s *The Red Detachment of Women* (《紅色娘子軍》, 1961), see Ng, “Inhibition vs. Exhibition,” 29.

reduced to servitude and hounded by Nationalists on the Nanwan peninsula of Hainan.⁴⁴

These cultural and geographical antecedents, never explicitly flagged, and largely invisibilized due in part to the British censoring of these two films in Hong Kong during the 1960s, may have bolstered Chinese support for *Boat People*, designed less to celebrate local culture than to assert a gathering centralized authority.⁴⁵ Though Cam Nuong is hardly a model collectivist, the facts of the film's production implicitly link Ma's Cam to her earlier sisters in distress on Hainan. Taken together, the protagonists of *The Red Detachment of Women*, *Waves on the Southern Shore*, and *Boat People* stand as so many vulnerable girls seeking freedom from oppression across the arc of colonial occupation: before Japanese occupation in the case of *The Red Detachment of Women*, during Japanese occupation in *Waves on the Southern Shore*, and after Japanese occupation in *Boat People*—or, if you like, after French and American occupation in the fictionalized Vietnam of *Boat People*, and before the end of British occupation in Hong Kong.

Unable to speculate on the aftermath of British colonialism directly, the aftermath of French colonialism in Vietnam offered Hui a suitable stand-in. Making colonial inroads into Vietnam in the later nineteenth century, France initially established a defensive redoubt at Fort Bayard, where they formally acquired a leasehold colony from the Chinese, Guangzhou Bay 廣州灣; also stylized variously as Kwang-chow-wan, Kouang-tcheou-wan, and Guangzhouwan, known today as Zhanjiang 湛江 in Guangdong Province, under a 99-year term that matched the British claim on Hong Kong. Thus the urban fabric of Zhanjiang, though posing on screen as a postwar Da Nang, offers in both its factual and fictional guises a postcolonial air with French remainders, offering a prospective analogue to the anticipated postcolonial air with British remainders of a Hong Kong then poised to be fully reclaimed by China.

The geographical logic is hardly accidental: in fact, in the early twentieth century, "Guangzhouwan (today's Zhanjiang), a French concession ... served as

44 For more on the censoring of this film by the authorities in British Hong Kong, see Michael Ng, *Political Censorship in British Hong Kong*, 112–113.

45 Whereas "the island's tropical foliage and indigenous culture—visible throughout the mise-en-scène and in sequences featuring folk dance performances and songs in Hainan dialect—featured prominently in the 1961 film," according to Harris, "Re-makes/ Re-models," 318, these local elements all but disappear in Hui's Hainan, which offers a Hong Kong take—with Beijing's blessing—on a Hainan that serves as nothing so much as a stage set stand-in for Vietnam.

the transit port between Hong Kong and Vietnam,”⁴⁶ as indeed it does in Hui’s film, mediating the Hong Kong she pretends to ignore and the Da Nang that she can only pretend to know given the ongoing political turmoil in Vietnam. One hundred years ago, Zhanjiang was a key site in the projection of French soft power, where, “primary among the means of promoting French culture was the Cinema de Paris—the only cinema in Guangzhouwan—where mostly silent French films were played.”⁴⁷ Once a beachhead for colonial inroads, in the twenty-first century, Zhanjiang has become an increasingly crucial site of Chinese resistance to Western imposition, today serving as the People’s Liberation Army Navy (中國人民解放軍海軍) South Sea Fleet (南海艦隊) headquarters.⁴⁸ Some 300 miles to the west of Hong Kong, the Pearl River Delta, and the Greater Bay Area more generally, Zhanjiang plays a crucial military role in ensuring the ongoing integration of the region, which, according to Jeffrey Wasserman, stands as “part of a larger design for asserting claims in the South China Sea, and from there, to the Pacific Ocean more generally.”⁴⁹

Given its position in one of the most politically sensitive marine regions in the entire world, it is no surprise that a film shot on location and spanning several key sites in the South China Sea should have occasioned a great deal of political controversy. As “a movie much-talked about but apparently seldom viewed,”⁵⁰ *Boat People* has been read variously as a “haunting, Southeast Asian updating of *The Ugly American*,”⁵¹ a “bitter epic, ostensibly about post-liberation Vietnam,”⁵² a “wartime melodrama” turning on “a Japanese journalist’s unsuccessful attempt to rescue a South Vietnamese Chinese woman on the eve of the communist takeover of South Vietnam,”⁵³ and more recently as

46 Yajun Mo, *Touring China: A History of Travel Culture, 1912–1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 143.

47 Mathilde Kang, *Francophonie and the Orient: French-Asian Transcultural Crossings (1840–1940)*, translated by Martin Munro (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 72.

48 On Zhanjiang’s role as a linchpin in the Chinese naval infrastructure, see Fravel, M. Taylor, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 33, no. 3 (2011): 292–319.

49 Jeffrey Wasserman, *Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2020), 15.

50 Julian Stringer, “*Boat People*: Second Thoughts on Text and Context,” in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 42.

51 Enrique Fernández, “Enrique Fernández from New York,” *Film Comment* 19, no. 4 (1983): 4.

52 Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 214.

53 Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, “Besides Fists and Blood: Hong Kong Comedy and Its Master of the Eighties,” *Cinema Journal* 37, no. 2 (1998): 18.

an “allegory of Hong Kong’s uncertain future.”⁵⁴ These readings frame the film’s geographies variously in terms of its Chinese, Hong Kong, and Vietnamese particulars. But by the time *Boat People* was screened at Cannes, Hong Kong’s future was already resolving, and by the time Akutagawa returns to Da Nang early in the film, communism had already enshrined itself in Vietnam. Under the surface, a film about turning away from a French Vietnam is also a film about turning toward a Chinese Hong Kong.

While Janet Maslin argued at the time of its release that *Boat People* “never generates an air of realism, or frees itself from coincidence and cliché,”⁵⁵ Karen Jahne hailed “Hui’s attempt to find a balance of fiction and nonfiction.”⁵⁶ For others, that attempted balance is skewed less in the direction of fiction than of falsehood, not only in Cháo Fù’s dismissal, discussed above, but also in Elliot Stein’s withering critique of the film. Given that Hui had “never been to Vietnam,” Stein argued that her “denial of anything political in the film registers as naivete, self-delusion, or downright prevarication,” cautioning that “it would be simplistic, even foolish, to fault the film as anti-Communist” since it was “shot in mainland China ... with the full cooperation of the Communist Chinese army,” who played “the roles of the Vietnamese soldiers and police.”⁵⁷

Without insisting on its documentary or fictional status, Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun located *Boat People* among several comparable films including Volker Schlöndorff’s *Circle of Deceit* (1981), Peter Weir’s *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983), Roger Spottiswoode’s *Under Fire* (1983), Roland Joffe’s *The Killing Fields* (1984), and Oliver Stone’s *Salvador* (1986). These films center on variations of “a journalist who is described as a mythical hero,” revealing “political tensions prevailing in a particularly exposed region,” and bent on “defending the right to information against those who are holding the political power” in “championing the cause of democracy, now characterized by transparency and divulgence.”⁵⁸ Yet as Julian Stringer observes, unlike the protagonists of these films, Akutagawa’s “position as adventurer-hero is consistently undercut,” and it would be “difficult to imagine the Third World investigation films’ white Western male subjects ... immolated in flames, as Akutagawa is

54 Wendy Gan, *Fruit Chan’s Durian* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 32–33.

55 Janet Maslin, “Film Festival; Vietnam’s Boat People,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1983.

56 Karen Jahne and Anne Hui, “Boat People: An Interview with Anne Hui,” *Cinéaste* 13, no. 2 (1984): 17.

57 Stephen Harvey, Elliott Stein, and Harlan Jacobson, “The 21st New York Film Festival,” *Film Comment* 19, no. 6 (1983): 72.

58 Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, “Le Faussaire et l’Objectif,” *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 86 (January – June 1989): 75.

at the end of *Boat People*,” with the possibility of such a violent outcome for Mel Gibson’s Guy Hamilton in *The Year of Living Dangerously* or James Woods’s Richard Boyle in *Salvador* as “too much of a ‘downer.’”⁵⁹

How to explain the fiery climax of *Boat People*? The logic of Akutagawa’s death can be read not only as a form of vengeance against the Japanese interloper by the Vietnamese authorities at the level of the film’s diegesis but also as a form of vengeance against the interloper by the Chinese authorities at the level of the film’s production. This is but one of many of the film’s doubling strategies, whose geocritical and metacinematic dimensions can be clarified in considering the opening and closing frames of the film, which have much to reveal about the hundred thousand frames that come between them.

Boat People begins *in medias res* with a dramatic, intricate, highly painterly frame of a victorious army convoy rolling through an urban street, focusing on a large tank carrying several soldiers flanked by waving civilians (Figure 7.1). This incredibly abrupt and jarring opening offers a point of entry for Akutagawa, who subsequently walks into the lower left portion of the frame to photograph first the tank and then the audience—in the diegetic sense, as sited within the frame, watching the convoy, and, in a cinematic sense, as seated beyond the frame, watching the film—before shifting back to the tank again, within five seconds after the first image appears on the screen (Figure 7.2). From the very first, an extraordinary slippage emerges between Hui and Akutagawa as photographers. In cinematic terms, we have something intricately staged. But if the illusion seems tempered by the ostensible documentary impulse of the film’s photojournalist, it is finally reinforced: here is someone pretending to capture a reality whose very falsity has been thoroughly and artfully documented by the filmmaker herself.

Recourse to classical Chinese film theory may help to elucidate what is at stake here. In Victor Fan’s reading, the Chinese term *bīzhēn* 逼真 (verisimilitude) touches on the ways that film approaches without necessarily constituting and thus in effect reconstituting reality. As Fan explains, “what the Chinese film theorists meant by the term “*bizhen*” was that the cinematographic image, within its technological limitations, has yet to be a form of total reality, though it allows the spectators to apprehend an effect as though they had been there when the event actually happened.”⁶⁰ In this case, there are two events to

59 Julian Stringer, “*Boat People*: Second Thoughts on Text and Context,” in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 43.

60 Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 198.



FIGURE 7.1 Ann Hui, *Boat People* (1982). Initial frame of the opening scene



FIGURE 7.2 Ann Hui, *Boat People* (1982). Seconds later, Akutagawa enters the scene.

consider: the historical Vietnamese victory convoy passing through Da Nang, and the filmic Chinese re-enactment of the convoy through Zhanjiang.

It requires slowing down to understand what this opening frame presents. In Stanley Cavell's account, "film can depict the fantastic as readily as the natural,"⁶¹ but what we have here is a depiction that is simultaneously fantastic *and* natural. On the one hand, it is a phantasm of Vietnamese victory over American

61 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 17.

colonialism in 1975, and on the other, a document of a long-hindered and still-splintered Chinese film industry preparing to mature along one of its most crucial military thresholds: in Hainan and Zhanjiang, and, for the first time since coming to power in 1949, in collaboration with a Hong Kong filmmaker and film crew. What, then, is this frame as a piece of film history? Among other things, it encapsulates Cavell's concern that "we do not know what a photograph is; we do not know how to place it ontologically."⁶² If, as Cavell claims, film offers "a succession of automatic world projections,"⁶³ this opening scene offers a pair of worlds, for we are looking simultaneously at a staged Vietnam and a screened China in a doubling that will characterize every single frame to follow.

Embedded within this opening frame are various elements of material culture: from the military uniforms of the soldiers and the conical sun hats of the civilians to the billboards, flags, and signs on the walls of the building in the background. The initial spectatorial task proves tremendous: what and whom are we regarding, where, and why? The diegetic tank is Vietnamese, but the actual tank is Chinese, as are the soldiers, whose uniforms scarcely conceal the fact in their telltale helmet insignia. The sun hats are less easily located: donned by Chinese and Vietnamese alike, they are worn here by actual refugees returned to China *from* Vietnam, posing here as though they were fictional refugees who left China *for* Vietnam. In the upper left background of the frame, a South Vietnamese flag defiantly hangs from a window; within a minute's running time another such flag fluttering on a second-floor balcony is hastily pulled inside an apartment above the convoy. In the upper right background of the frame, a Coca-Cola billboard is largely occluded by the profile of a soldier, suggesting the superimposition of globalized capitalism and nationalized militarism.⁶⁴ Like the South Vietnamese flag, the Coca-Cola billboard points to the American underpinnings of this frame and the histories it represents.

Links between this Asian scene and its American underpinnings also emerge via a closer scrutiny of cinema history. The filmic tank rolling through the Chinese city of Zhanjiang—posing for the plot's purposes as the Vietnamese city of Da Nang—recalls an earlier image of a filmic tank rolling through a conquered city: namely, the tank that passes through Rome in the third

62 Ibid., 17–18.

63 Ibid., 167.

64 Less than a minute later, further down the street, Hui's opening traveling shot pans past a Löwenbräu flag, a visual synecdoche for the conquered and occupied German city of Munich, and to the associated geographical subtext of Nazism and its aftermath as explored, for example, in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974).



FIGURE 7.3 Roberto Rossellini, *Paisan* (1946). Third episode: Allies enter Rome

episode of Roberto Rossellini's *Paisan* (1946), auguring a *Pax Americana* at an angle and an orientation that are nearly identical (Figure 7.3). Both sequences rely on traveling shots, with Rossellini incorporating newsreel footage into his dramatic arc and Hui relying on a studied and stylized docudrama framing. Hui's composition relies closely on Rossellini's even as it builds on her earlier pair of works in the Vietnam Trilogy (越南三部曲), the television episode of *Below the Lion Rock* (《獅子山下》) titled *The Boy from Vietnam* (《來客》, 1978), and *The Story of Woo Viet* (《胡越的故事》, 1981). Relying on Chinese actors and subject to Chinese censors—as Rossellini relied on American actors and was subject to American censors—Hui negotiates a gap at once temporal and spatial marked not only by the distance between 1975 and 1982 but also by the distance between Zhanjiang and Da Nang. In fact, the Chinese army rolls through the city of Zhanjiang, formerly a French concession. In fiction, they portray the Vietnamese army rolling through the city of Da Nang, formerly a French colony. By implication, they suggest that the Chinese army may someday roll through the city of Hong Kong, in its twilight as a British colony—perhaps even someday rolling through the city of Da Nang, which may be subject in due course to the expanding influence of the Sinosphere, if not to a twenty-first century *Pax Sinica*.

The doublings and reversals apparent in the film's opening frame and scene suffuse its entire running time. One particularly remarkable inversion occurs when Akutagawa encounters a set of refugees outside an administrative building. Asking what these people are doing there, he's told that they are Chinese and that the government wants them to register. By the diegetic logic of the film, some refugees from China are being closely monitored in Vietnam, but the photographs themselves are of Vietnamese refugees (largely of Chinese descent) being closely monitored in China, namely in Hainan. Later, when Van Nhac tells Akutagawa that the government would never let him and his siblings be photographed, he speaks not only by the diegetic logic of the film as a child surveilled by the Vietnamese government but also by the logic of the film's production as a child surveilled by the Chinese government. Later, when Van Nhac is killed by an unexploded landmine in a New Economic Zone, the ordnance, while apparently American, is in fact Chinese.⁶⁵ Yet ultimately, Hui's film offers more patent criticism of the American government than of the Chinese government. The American violence killing the family members of Akutagawa in Japan and Cam Nuong in Vietnam echoes the American violence in *Paisan*, where, late in the second episode, the orphaned Pasquale confesses in the squalid ruins of Naples that his parents were killed by Allied airstrikes in Italy. Joe, the Black GI who hears Pasquale's confession, surely had untold stories to tell about American violence against his own family as well.

With the disgrace of her mother and the deaths of her elder brother and Akutagawa, Cam Nuong is effectively orphaned at film's end, finding herself the protector of her second brother, Van Lang, who is, by implication, unlike his sister, the product of South Korean paternity. In the film's final photographic flourish (Figure 7.4), Hui captures the two children in an existential freeze frame redolent of the concluding freeze frames linked by a zoom shot in François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), fixing Antoine Doinel (portrayed by Jean-Pierre Léaud) directly in the spectatorial gaze, which he vulnerably returns having fled coastward only to turn away from the sea's horizon. By resorting to the film grammars of Rossellini and Truffaut in the opening and closing frames of *Boat People*, a film made in China but not expressly about China, Hui affirms Gina Marchetti's reading of her position among the many Hong Kong filmmakers who "tend to look at mainland China from the sidelines, using political dissidents, overseas Chinese, and aesthetic idioms from

65 For an elaboration on this point see Kennedy, "Boat People," 44.

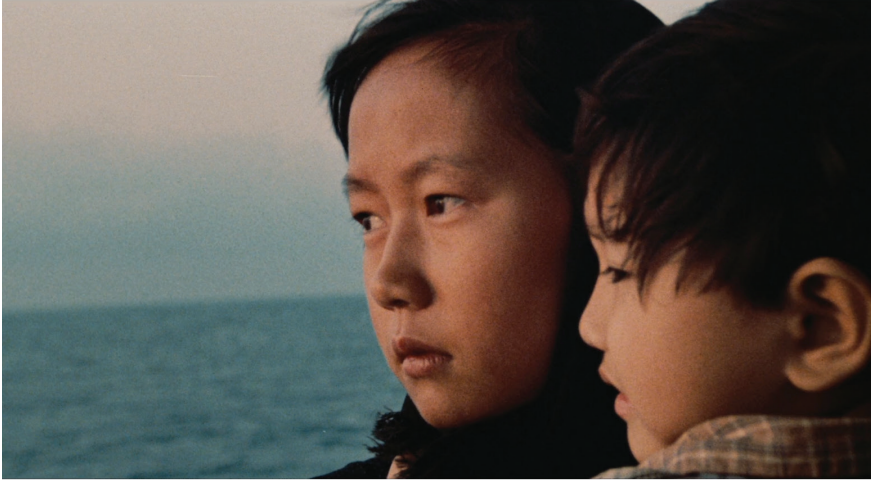


FIGURE 7.4 Ann Hui, *Boat People* (1982). Concluding freeze frame, final scene



FIGURE 7.5 Fran  ois Truffaut, *The 400 Blows* (1959). Antoine turns his back on the sea.

Europe and America to distinguish their perspective from that of their peers across the border.”⁶⁶

In Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*, the shot is held instantaneously (Figure 7.5) before a rapid, uneven zoom leads to a final freeze frame with the French word *FIN* superimposed over Doinel’s face. Here, in the film’s final images stands a child who has reached the end of his journey outward. Falling into a life of delinquency and petty crime, fleeing reform school, running to the sea’s edge, and finally walking along the shore, the only thing left for him is to turn at

66 Gina Marchetti, *Citing China: Politics, Postmodernism, and World Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018), 182.

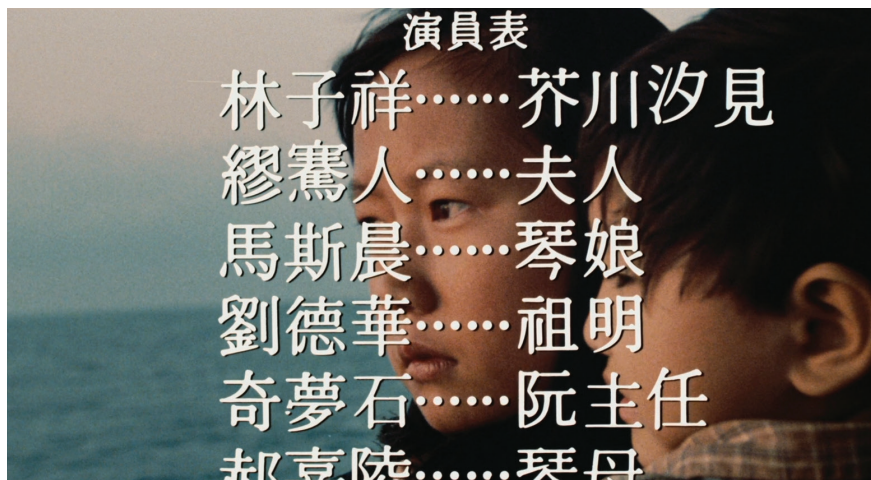


FIGURE 7.6 Ann Hui, *Boat People* (1982). Credits rolling over the freeze frame

land's end and face the consequences, with no exit, looking eastward up the mouth of the Seine, back to Paris, and France.⁶⁷

By contrast, in Hui's *Boat People*, the shot is held for over 90 seconds, allowing the Chinese-language credits to roll over the children's faces (Figure 7.6). This has a different effect, signaling the authority of the written Chinese language over all that it overwrites: a Hong Kong film, its Cantonese dialogue (in the more locally-inflected dubbed version), and its fictional Vietnamese refugees.⁶⁸ The children look toward the rising sun just as earlier in the scene their boat travels toward the rising sun. Whether leaving the fictional Da Nang or the photographed Zhanjiang, the boat and the children move eastward along the northern rim of the South China Sea toward Hong Kong. This is the moment when the two South China Seas converge: in depicting a fictional departure from the Bay of Da Nang by filming a photographic departure from Leizhou Bay, Hui works in the South China Sea twice over, and in both cases she orients her film's denouement toward Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area. As the

67 Truffaut, too, had a geographic logic on location: shifting from Paris to the coastal Normandy commune of Honfleur and moving near the mouth of the Seine, his debut film flows westward along a French current to the southern edge of the body of water known in Britain as the English Channel and in France as la Manche, a key node of international and globalized import just as pivotal to northwestern Eurasia as the northern edge of the South China Sea is to southeastern Eurasia.

68 As Lim argues, "the simple act of speaking Cantonese as a native tongue effectively makes Hong Kongers semantic subalterns, second-class linguistic citizens." See Lim, *Indelible City*, 156.

film's concluding credits make clear, this is an eastward journey that will ultimately be governed and marked by the Chinese rather than the British.

In more recent decades, Hong Kong's ongoing political predicament has been exemplified more overtly in films such as John Woo's *Bullet in the Head* (《喋血街頭》, 1990), Fruit Chan's 陳果 *Made in Hong Kong* (《香港製造》, 1997), Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (《花樣年華》, 2000), Johnnie To's *Election* (《黑社會》, 2005), and Hui's own *Our Time Will Come* (《明月幾時有》, 2017). But at a time when Hong Kong cinema was being redefined in the shift from serious period pieces such as Chang Cheh's *Five Shaolin Masters* (《少林五祖》, 1974) to more lighthearted kung fu action films such as Jackie Chan's *Dragon Lord* (《龍少爺》, 1982), Hui's *Boat People* helped to augur a return toward these later political allegories by employing a subtle geographical logic that indirectly crystalized the shifting fortunes of a colony poised between American, Asian, and European claims along the South China Sea. Made after the sensational stylizations of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and before the presentational stylizations of Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), Ann Hui's *Boat People* charted a middle course.

Because *Boat People* emerged on the international circuit at the precise moment when the long arc of the city's transfer from British to Chinese control began to unwind, it registers as a work that can be read in resistance to colonialisms of various kinds—American, British and French as well as Chinese and Japanese. On the one hand, the logics of Hui's *Boat People* suggest that there can be no escape from American, British, or French remainders. One example of this comes in the nostalgic and pathetic figure of Officer Nguyen (portrayed by Shi Menqi), an ambivalent revolutionary who longs for and faintly reproduces the thrills of his colonial education in France. Another comes in the figure of To Minh 祖明, who, before dying in a boat fired on by the Vietnamese authorities, dreams of reuniting with his older lover, the unnamed Madame 夫人 (portrayed by Cora Miao 繆騫人), in New Orleans, where they might open their own bar, trading legacies of American, British, and French colonialism along the South China Sea for legacies of American, British, and French colonialism along the Gulf of Mexico.⁶⁹

Yet the marks of Chinese and Japanese imperialism prove just as indelible, if less apparent. For one thing, the very structure of the relationship between Madame and To Minh proves redolent of a similar subplot in *No Greater Love*

69 For a reading of Cora Miao's Madame, see Fan, *Extraterritoriality*, 129–130, in whom he locates “the affect of being extraterritorial” as she distills “how one feels to be a Hong Konger caught between two occupying forces” (130).

(1959), the first installment of Masaki Kobayashi's 小林正樹 epic war trilogy *The Human Condition* (《人間の條件》, 1959–1961), set in Manchukuo during the waning days of the Japanese Empire. Secondly, Akutagawa's Kodak and Ilford film canisters may be American and British, respectively, but his camera, a Fuji, is Japanese. If, following the logic of the movie's narrative, Akutagawa's film could not have been shot without the permission of the Vietnamese government, then by the logic of the movie's making, Hui's film could not have been shot without the permission of the Chinese government.

Ostensibly a film about Vietnam in terms of its plot lines, *Boat People* is fundamentally a film about China in terms of its production. Indeed, it can be seen, however subtly, as a salvo working over and against the waning censorial prerogatives of the British crown and helping to transcend that long echo of the “China-Humiliating” films (辱華片): literally, “humiliation” films that “insult the Chinese nation,” which date from Albert Capellani's *The Red Lantern* (1919) and Colin Campbell's *The First Born* (1921).⁷⁰ As a kind of answer to such humiliation films, *Boat People*, which begins with an image of the Chinese military triumphant play-acting as the Vietnamese military triumphant and ends with a wall of Chinese text projected over a freeze frame of two children adrift in the South China Sea, can be read not only as a document of social realism attendant to the cascading sufferings of East and Southeast Asians in diaspora but also as an early instance of a “triumph film” (勝利電影), paving the way for more recent, more unvarnished examples of Chinese lionization on the global screen, such as Zhang Yimou's *The Great Wall* (《長城》, 2016) and Chen Kaige 陳凱歌, Tsui Hark, and Dante Lam's 林超賢 *The Battle at Lake Changjin* (《長津湖》, 2021).

3 Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, the Chinese film industry has advanced considerably, with Beijing significantly outpacing Hong Kong in terms of production and profit.⁷¹ As Beijing's first collaboration with the Hong Kong film industry,

70 Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality*, 30. For more on the history of the humiliation film, see Yiman Wang, “Chinese Cinema's Other: Wrangling over ‘China-Humiliating’ Films (RuHua Pian),” in *Theorizing Colonial Cinema: Reframing Production, Circulation, and Consumption of Film in Asia*, eds. Nayoung Aimee Kwon, Takushi Odagiri, and Moonim Baek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 92–110.

71 In 1990, Hong Kong made twice as many films as Beijing; by 2016, Beijing made fifteen times as many films as Hong Kong. On film production models shaping Chinese and Hong Kong markets, see Shekhar Deshpande and Meta Mazaj, *World Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 84–89.

made on Hainan and depicting a Vietnam that China had recently engaged in a brief border war, *Boat People* turns not only on regional collaboration and migration but also on the subtexts of regional conflict, national ambition, and imperial succession. China's aspirations for larger regional control spring in part from "the interconnections between northern Vietnam, Hainan Island, and the Leizhou Peninsula [雷州半島]," anchored by Zhanjiang, which "are so deep and go back so far in the history of this region that waters between them should be properly regarded as country roads rather than international waters."⁷² Thinking geocritically, it becomes clear that the recent, persistent, and pending colonial struggles, national rifts, and imperial contestations dividing these sites and others along the rim of the South China Sea have done much to fuel the anger, ferment, rage, and wrath that made Ann Hui's *Boat People* such a timely and unlikely project, and such a necessary one.⁷³

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72 Li Tana. "Epidemics, Trade, and Local Worship, in Vietnam, Leizhou Peninsula, and Hainan Island," in *Imperial China and Its Southern Neighbors*, edited by Victor H. Mair and Liam C. Kelley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 207.

73 In a 2011 interview, thinking retrospectively about her career to date, Hui allowed that "in regards to China-Hong Kong co-productions, I just heard that things weren't so good," and acknowledged that in the present moment "it would not be easy to obtain filming permission in the Mainland." Quoted in Esther M. K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam, "Interview with Ann Hui: On the Edge of the Mainstream," in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, edited by Esther M. K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 74.

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Vampires vs Hopping Vampires: Mr Vampire Series and Hong Kong Vampire Hunters

Magdalen Ki

1 Introduction

Hopping vampires dominated Hong Kong horror movies in the 1980s and 1990s. My goal is to foreground the fundamental differences between the vampires of the West and the hopping vampires of Hong Kong, and my focus is on the iconic Mr Vampire Series (殭屍先生系列) produced by the influential but short-lived Bo Ho Films Company Limited (寶禾影業有限公司, 1980–1992). In the West, vampires are exotic, aristocratic bloodsuckers that pose a threat to the Christian heritage. Vampires have great sex appeal, strong intellectual power, and shape-shifting abilities. Their emergence signifies not only the links between longevity, blood lust, and paganism but also the desire to topple existing social and family systems. On the other hand, hopping vampires are ancestral, governmental figures in the East. Their unappealing presence is characterized by their outdated outfit, zombie-like inarticulateness, and clumsy movement. In Hong Kong, the emergence of Mr Vampire Series denotes a critical reflection of Hongkongers' anxieties due to cultural and historical changes, highlighting misalignment between the Confucian and contemporary outlook, multiculturalism and xenophobia, mainstream religion and occultism. Given the colonial government's intolerance of political lobbying through films, Hong Kong vampire hunters must tread a fine line in order to seek the right kind of “apolitical correctness” and mutual coexistence: gifted individuals should save themselves, help their fellow humans, neutralize dangerous (local and non-local, new and traditional) elements, take care of selected human-friendly ghosts and vampires, and value both compassion and competitiveness in a world of live and let live.

A series of films about *geongsi/jiangshi* (殭屍) or hopping vampires emerged in the last decade of the pre-handover period. In the 1970s, the Hong Kong film industry was marked by a cultural divide, and Hong Kong filmmakers were keen to produce lowbrow comedic Cantonese-speaking kung-fu movies and depart from the epic Mandarin-speaking martial arts films. The local film business was dominated by the Shaw Brothers' Film Company (邵氏兄弟有限公司)

and Raymond Chow's 鄒文懷 Golden Harvest Film Production Company (嘉禾電影有限公司), though Chow (1927–2018) was eager to adopt a satellite operation to fund new ventures, giving a high degree of autonomy to its subsidiaries. Due to his growing fame, Sammo Hung 洪金寶 (b. 1952) teamed up with Raymond Chow to found the Bo Ho Films Company Limited in 1980, and Hung became a key figure in defining the hopping vampire film genre with the making of *Spooky Encounter* (《鬼打鬼》, 1980) and *The Dead and the Deadly* (《人嚇人》, 1982). Hung also produced the Mr Vampire Series (1985–1989), consisting of five films with unrelated plots and themes. The success of these movies led to a spin-off of many similar productions such as *New Mr Vampire* (《殭屍翻生》, 1987), *The Ultimate Vampire* (《殭屍至尊》, 1991), *Exorcist Master* (《驅魔道長》, 1992), *Mr Vampire 1992* (《新殭屍先生》, 1992), *The Musical Vampire* (《音樂殭屍》, 1992). As the market became saturated, public interest died down for a while. However, the twenty-first century saw a quiet revival, leading to films such as *Vampire Controller* (《趕屍先生》, 2001), *The Era of Vampires* (《殭屍大時代》, 2002), *Vampire Warriors* (《殭屍新戰士》, 2010), *Rigor Mortis* (《殭屍》, 2013), *Sifu vs Vampire* (《天師鬥殭屍》, 2014), *Vampire Cleanup Department* (《救僵清道夫》, 2017), and *Meet Mr Vampire* (《新殭屍先生2》, 2018).

In Hong Kong, the birth of hopping vampire films coincided with a political period that was characterized by fear and uncertainty. The British and the Beijing governments began a series of negotiations in the early 1980s, leading to the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. However, public disputes about democratic reforms did not end, and Hongkongers were constantly torn between a progressive outlook and a strategic conservatism, noting that the collapse of the economy could bring about a disastrous doom to all. As noted by Teresa A. Goddu, people's fascination with vampires is often linked to crisis, and vampires "change according to their time."¹ When society is experiencing family breakdown, gender disorientation, medical crisis, political problems, immigration issues, or cultural threats, the vampire always returns. In turn, "vampiric discourse is about fear," the "fear of change, fear of the other," and fear of becoming the other.²

Hopping vampires are problematic because they represent the worst of two possible (insider and outsider) worlds. Fontaine Lien observes that hopping vampires "appeal to anglophone audiences" because of their oriental perspectives. They are outsiders wearing the official robe (官服) of the Qing dynasty

1 Teresa A Goddu, "Vampire Gothic." *American Literary History* 11 no. 1 (1999): 129.

2 Linda Heidenreich, "Vampires Among Us," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 24 (2012): 93.

(1644–1911) while they share “characteristics of both the vampire and the zombie” in the West.³ To Hongkongers, the hopping vampire represents the return of the forgotten past and the rise of “new” invasive insiders. Chinese people prioritize ancestral worship. However, the “death of the father” is quickly followed by the return of monstrous father figures eager to destroy their descendants. In contrast to the sexy, mind-controlling western vampires, hopping vampires are pre-modern, disorganized outsiders. Rational dialogue becomes impossible, and the paternal gaze denotes lawlessness. Second, hopping vampires represent the return of old-school politics and politicians. Given that hopping vampires don feudalistic government garb and threaten the local populace, the prevalence of a prey-predator relationship signifies a critique of pre-modern authorities. Instead of safeguarding social order, they destroy peace in the family and the neighborhood. In what follows, I will briefly compare the ways of vampires and hopping vampires, contextualize the portrayal of hopping vampires in traditional Chinese culture, and use Mr Vampire Series as an example to explore Hong Kong’s cultural compass.

2 Night Prowlers: East and West

Vampires are living dead creatures, even though the western version is very different from the eastern version. The European vampire is an exotic figure with a long history, and it is a “pan-European phenomenon” with East European roots.⁴ Vampires are first defined by the separation of soul from body. The soulless body does not decompose with the passage of time. Second, vampires are noted for their blood lust, or “blood-drunkenness.”⁵ When dug up, blood flows freely if a knife is inserted in the flesh. According to the occultist Montague Summers, there are several reasons why vampires exist. First, some are born vampires: “The children born of the devil and a witch are “desperately wicked.” Second, people become vampires due to their “more than ordinarily evil life.” “The vampire is believed to be one who has devoted himself during his life to the practice of Black Magic, and it is hardly to be supposed that such persons would rest undisturbed, while it is easy to believe that their malevolence had

3 Fontaine Lien, “The Hong Kong Vampire Returns: Nostalgia, Pastiche and Politics in *Rigor Mortis*,” in *Vampire Films Around the World: Essays on the Cinematic Undead of Sixteen Cultures*, ed. James Aubrey (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2020), 47.

4 Tomislav Longinovic, *Vampire Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 33.

5 Montague Summers, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trebbler & Co., 1928), 19, 4.

set in action forces which might prove powerful for terror and destruction even when they were in their graves.”⁶ Third, some are reduced by circumstances to become vampires because they are “buried with mutilated rites.” Greeks and Romans of classical times believed that “the dead should be consigned to the tomb with full and solemn ceremony” in order to help the soul rest in peace. If humans lay unburied or buried without proper mourning or lamentation, bodies that are “not dissolved might return” as “reanimated corpses,” and these vampires are eager to satisfy their lust for “vengeance upon the living.”⁷ Finally, some are doomed by grave sins to be vampires as they are shut out from heaven due to excommunication. As a result,

The Devil revitalizes and energizes these dead bodies which he preserves for a long time in their entirety; he appears with the actual face and in the likeness of the dead, stalking abroad up and down the streets, and presently he will parade the country roads and the fields; he bursts his way into men's houses, filling many with awful fear, leaving others dumb with horror, whilst others are even killed; he proceeds to acts of violence and blood, and strikes terror into every heart.⁸

In terms of development, the first wave of European vampires is not a well-defined category, uniting the characteristics of “revenants,” “night spirits,” and “classical bloodsuckers.” Slavonian “witches and werewolves” are combined to form “the historically unified concept of the vampire that emerged in early-modern Central and Balkan Europe.”⁹ Bram Stoker (1847–1912) immortalized Dracula in his 1897 novel, but it is Angela Carter (1940–1992) and Anne Rice (1941–2021) who produced the second wave of vampires by foregrounding the abject state of vampiric existence. Powerful they may be, but they are liminal, frustrated creatures who yearn for companionship and are thwarted by different forces from time to time. The postmodern era arguably signifies the third wave of vampirism, or a new breed of romantic, “altruistic vampires.” A prominent example is Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Saga (2005–2020), a series romanticizing vampirism and making the point that love can change a group of bloodsuckers to become guardians of humans.

In the West, vampire hunters are usually gifted laymen with different strategies of resistance to defeat vampires. Abraham Van Helsing is a professor,

⁶ Ibid., 79, 78.

⁷ Ibid., 81, 84.

⁸ The words of Father François Richard. Quoted from Summers, *The Vampire*, 32.

⁹ Longinovic, *Vampire Nation*, xix.

a “philosopher and a metaphysician” and an “advanced scientist.”¹⁰ Buffy Summers, the title character of the Buffy the Vampire Slayer franchise (1997–2023), is a talented teenage student who reluctantly becomes a Slayer, recruited, trained, and supervised by the Watchers’ Council. In the TV series *Supernatural* (2005–2020), Sam and Dean Winchester are taught by their father, a hunter of demons. Vampire hunters often weaponize the Holy Communion, the Crucifix, garlic, mirrors, and sunlight to combat vampires. According to tradition, vampires’ extermination is completed by decapitation “with the sharp edge of a sexton’s spade” (instead of a sword) and piercing the heart with a stake made of aspen or maple.¹¹ In Bulgaria, vampires can be put in a bottle.¹² However, the best method “of destroying a Vampire appears to be either to consume him by fire,” with the heart often boiled and the body cut into pieces before being tossed into the fire.¹³

Chinese vampires are different. *Geongsi* or *jiangshi* literally means a “stiff corpse,” and the original version appears to have little blood obsession and may not be a hopping creature.¹⁴ First, the existence of the living dead is central to Chinese beliefs because life and death are positioned on a continuum: the dead can protect the living, humans can instrumentalize the living dead for their use, and revenants possess a will of their own to help or harm humans. Second, vampires are not quintessentially interested in blood but in sucking out the victim’s stream of life (*qi* 氣). Once bitten, a human will join the ranks of the undead, and the spread of aphasia and irrationality can lead to great social damage, if not to the death of civilization. Third, given that magic folks can manufacture vampires for their own use, not all vampires are deemed wicked or unproductive creatures. As a result, vampire hunters must sort out the different strategies in their battle against vampires.

10 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: Ignatius Press, 1897/2012), 165.

11 Summers, *The Vampire*, 206. “It is highly important that the body of the Vampire should be transfixed by a single blow, for two blows or three would restore it to life” (204).

12 In Bulgaria, the method for “abolishing a Vampire” is by “bottling him. There are certain persons who make a profession of this; and their mode of procedure is as follows: The sorcerer, armed with a picture of some saint, lies in ambush until he sees the Vampire pass, when he pursues him with his *Eikon* [translation]; the poor Obour [translation] takes refuge in a tree or on the roof of a house, but his persecutor follows him up with the talisman, driving him away from all shelter, in the direction of a bottle specially prepared, in which is placed some of the vampire’s favorite food. Having no other resource, he enters this prison, and is immediately fastened down with a cork, on the interior of which is a fragment of the *Eikon*. The bottle is then thrown into the fire, and the Vampire disappears forever.” See Summers, *The Vampire*, 207.

13 Ibid., 206.

14 Lien, “The Hong Kong Vampire Returns,” 47.

In terms of historical development, the ancient Chinese vampire mostly foregrounds an incorrupt body, and its manifestation is close to that of an autocratic revenant or zombie. In Book 15 of a sixth-century geographical study entitled *A Study of River Systems* (水經注), the author mentions the discovery of a vampire in a cave,¹⁵ the emphasis being on the non-decomposed body. Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) wrote *Strange Tales* (《夷堅志》), a twelfth-century anthology of strange events and bizarre happenings. One of the stories discusses the adventure of Liu Zi-ang 劉子昂, who traveled to a new location to be a government official and found himself an additional wife. A Taoist priest observed Liu's bad complexion and gave him two yellow amulets to be placed on his door. On her return home, the woman refused to come in and threatened to leave. Since Liu loved her greatly, the amulets were destroyed. On a certain day, the Taoist priest visited Liu's home and ordered people to splash buckets of water on the floor, only to witness that the place could not become wet at all. Having dug up the ground, they found a large and non-degenerate body bearing the face of Liu's beloved.¹⁶

The appearance of the vampire also changes during the Qing Dynasty, a period when China had to confront the arrival of western colonizers. A number of texts emphasize the alien characteristics of the creature, that is, its whiteness, animality, and barbarous cannibalism. Ji Yun's 紀昀 1789–1798 story collection *Jottings from the Thatched Cottage* (《閱微草堂筆記》) highlights a vampire's animalistic appearance. In a story, Wu Gong-shan 胡宮山, a medical doctor, encounters and fights a vampire. The creature has white fur all over its body, red eyes, fingers shaped like crooked claws, and weapon-like teeth, and it smells of blood. The only problem is that the vampire cannot climb trees, hence Wu finds a way to safety. Wu later theorizes two causes of vampirism. The first type refers to newly dead but yet to be buried creatures. The symptoms are similar to those of a fake death, with the deceased showing signs of life despite being in a lifeless state. The second type refers to individuals who have been buried for decades but whose body refuses to decompose.¹⁷

15 Li Dao-Yuan 酈道元 (472–527), *Shui Jing Zhu* 水經注 [A Study of River Systems] in *The Chinese Text Project* 中國哲學書電子化計劃. <https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=569181&if=gb>.

16 Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202), *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志 [Strange Tales] in *The Chinese Text Project* 中國哲學書電子化計劃 <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=353232#p72>.

17 Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805), *Yue Wei Caotang Biji* 閱微草堂筆記 [Jottings from the Thatched Cottage] in *The Chinese Text Project* 中國哲學書電子化計劃, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=335940#p6>. According to *feng shui* experts, corpses that will not decompose are probably buried in dark, nourishing places; however, incorrupt corpses are also believed to be the cause of droughts. The drought-inducing vampire (旱魃) must be dug up and cremated in order to end the natural disaster. This superstition led to a

Vampires are portrayed in Chinese literature as unintelligent, antisocial, anti-modern creatures. “The Transforming Corpse” (屍變) is the third story in Pu Songling’s 蒲松齡 1680 short story collection *Liaozhai’s Records of the Strange* (《聊齋誌異》). The theme centers on the return of a newly dead daughter-in-law: the woman arises to suck the life energy out of three humans and runs after a man. To survive, the man hides behind a large tree, the morning hours reduce the woman to a stiff tree-hugger, and nothing can loosen her grasp of the trunk. Qi Xue-qiu 齊學裘 (b. 1803) wrote *Writings on More Adventures* (《見聞續筆》) and mentioned that the vampiric creature has white hairs, long eyebrows, a beard, and claw-like fingers.¹⁸

Hong Kong movies are wont to portray “hopping” vampires, and this special feature may be linked to the traditional “practice of carrying corpses home for burial” in Xiang Xi (湘西) province.¹⁹ It is a customary belief that Chinese people who die elsewhere should be brought to rest in their hometown. Since Xiang Xi is a mountainous region, vehicular transportation can be difficult. As a result, several corpses are clothed in fabric, placed in a vertical position with arms outstretched, and firmly tied to horizontal beams. Corpse bearers (趕屍匠) carry the beams on their shoulders, dangle the corpses, and convey all of them simultaneously. The leader of the parade rings a bell to warn villagers off the road. Given that the team journeys at midnight and the procession ends at four in the morning, the corpses’ awkward movement may have led to the “hopping vampire” legend. Another method is having a corpse bearer to carry a dried (and therefore lighter) corpse on his back, and this can create the illusion of a moving corpse.²⁰ Either way, the homebound journey could be a labor-intensive event in the old days.²¹

great many issues in the past because village authorities could randomly dig up and cremate corpses in order to induce rain. Affected families were understandably aggrieved given that desecration of a grave site was a major taboo in Chinese culture.

18 Qi Xue-qiu 齊學裘 (1803-?), *Jianwen Xubi* 見聞續筆 [Writings on More Adventures] in *The Chinese Text Project* 中國哲學書電子化計劃, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=852915#p141>.

19 Lien, “The Hong Kong Vampire Returns,” 48.

20 “Xiangxi zuihou yi ming gan shi jiang 湘西最後一名趕屍匠 [The Last Corpse Bearer in Xiangxi],” *China Jiangxi Radio and Television Network* 中國江西網絡廣播電視台, January 16, 2020, YouTube Video, 9.44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-7r5dWgb4s>.

21 Mark Twain (1835–1910) observes that in the nineteenth century, an overseas Chinese worker “hardly believes that he could enjoy the hereafter except his body lay in his beloved China.” As a result, when workers are alive, on “the Pacific coast, the Chinamen all belong to one or another of several great companies or organizations, and these companies keep track of their members, register their names, and ship their bodies home when they die ... Every ship that sails from San Francisco carries away a heavy freight of Chinese

In Hong Kong movies, the hopping vampires move around with their arms outstretched, while they also wear black robes with a mandarin-like square on the chest, indicating their status as civil servants of the Qing Dynasty. This is symbolic in the sense that Hongkongers are wary of political intervention due to colonial autocracy (Manchurian or British) as well as paternal autocracy (local, ancestral figures). According to Fontaine Lien, the vampire's political identity "reflects the Cantonese peoples' resentment at submitting to foreign (Manchurian) rule as well as their anger at being surrendered to Great Britain by that same outsider authority. Dressing the traditional cinematic *geongsi* in Manchurian officials' robes and *guan mao* 官帽 (officials' caps)" denotes an "easy way to evoke the authoritarianism and corruption" of ancient China. The film is about hopping vampires, but the living dead status is "no doubt a particularly apt representation of Hong Kong" due to its "in-between status" as a (former) "colony caught between East and West, between the past and the present."²² The arrival of vampires in government workwear means that there is no security in the Hong Kong psyche because local and foreign, traditional and new elements can disrupt social peace. Hong Kong citizens can easily be "turned," and become violent creatures to harm their own kind.

3 The Birth of Monsters: Life, Death, and the Living Dead

It is impossible to understand all the ghosts, revenants, spirits, and vampires in Hong Kong movies without knowing the basics of Chinese religions. In the West, the boundary between life and death is clear. The undead are the damned ones. In the East, there are different degrees of death, with life and death forming a continuum. Death refers to the separation of the body from *hun* (魂)—the heavenly spirit, and *po* (魄)—the earthly spirit. The body is buried, *hun* goes to heaven, and *po* returns to earth or resides within a spirit tablet or ancestral tablet (神主牌). Revenants are characterized by a body that is separated from the spirits.²³ Ghosts, on the other hand, are spirits only. Stephen

corpses. On the "labor contract, there is always a stipulation that his body shall be taken back to China if he dies." See Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford: American Publishing Co, 1872), 394.

22 Lien, "The Hong Kong Vampire Returns," 59.

23 According to Taoist literature, humans have three heavenly spirits and seven earthly spirits. The three heavenly spirits refer to the spirit of life, the spirit of the senses, and the spirit of understanding. See "Understanding the Human Soul," Daoist Gate, last modified 2024, <https://daoistgate.com/understanding-the-human-soul>.

F. Teiser argues that ghosts are “a species in transition. The dead person’s *hun* and *po* souls are unstable, waiting to be assigned their next rebirth.”²⁴

Buddhist cosmology states that a spectral existence is part of the six realms. The first realm refers to the worthiest individuals, who go to Heaven and become gods. The second highlights the next best group, who become demi-gods. The third refers to the majority, who are entitled to a transitional period of 49 days before their fate is decided. Mostly they are reborn as humans. The fourth denotes that those who have performed poorly will be reborn as animals. The fifth decrees that unsavory characters become hungry ghosts, and the last is reserved for the evil ones, who will go to hell. Interestingly, aborted or stillborn babies, those who commit suicide, die in unnatural, violent, or wrongful circumstances or are improperly buried are trapped and therefore linger on Earth. They are the undead, who cannot move on to the reincarnation phase. To become ready for rebirth, these creatures need to die a “second death,” often with a little help from Buddhist monks or Taoist priests.

Buddhism was imported to China from India during the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), and it emphasizes detachment from the world, the body, and the self. However, esoteric Buddhism is different from mainstream Buddhism because it may not foreground detachment. In fact, the Thai Buddhist cult of necromancy, or venerating and raising “ghost children,” is well known among Hong Kong people. Visitors to Thailand sometimes buy amulets and talismans such as *kuman thong* (baby amulets 古曼童 or “golden boy” in Thai), *kuman nee* (the female counterpart), or *lukok* (碌角) to seek protection and worldly success. The problem is that this practice requires the premature death of young beings. As they are trapped in this life, they are not ready for reincarnation. In addition, the superstition is that if these children bear many grudges, they can have great powers, hence they should preferably suffer violent deaths: the more violent the better. Both *kuman thong* and *kuman nee* involve the roasting of a dead baby by monks or black magicians to invoke the spirit of the dead.

24 Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 220. “The notion that ghosthood is *prima facie* a liminal stage also underlies the definition of a ghost provided in *A Complete Mastery of Correct Characters* (*Zhengzi tong* 正字通), an important late Ming dictionary: ‘Every human being must possess the vital stuff of yin and yang for his body to take shape. When yin and yang disperse, then a person dies. When someone first dies, after his previous yin (*qian yin* 前陰) has ended but before his later yin (*hou yin* 後陰) has come, there is his so-called ‘interim yin’ (*zhong yin* 中陰), which is what is commonly referred to as a ghost.’” See Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 50.

The dry-roasted baby is then painted before a layer of golden foil is applied.²⁵ Today, “foetuses are sometimes substituted with the ashes of a deceased child.”²⁶ For its part, *lukok* involves a dried fetus or a dead child that is processed and put in a bottle filled with special oil. The buyer will be the master of the ghost child, and the ghost child will be his guardian. However, high prices must be paid because the spectral helper can be demanding or jealous. Basic duties include the offering of sweets or foods and the gift of toys. Abandoning a ghost child can lead to major romantic, family, career, or health problems, even accidents. These ghost children are comparable to the Haitian zombies that “infused human life into the bottle and transformed the container into a living grave, housing a human-spirit hybrid entity,” thus questioning the ontological distinction between objects and subjects, the dead and the undead.²⁷ In both instances, humans use a suffering victim to increase their own fortune despite knowing that the source of power originates in pain, death, a denial of burial, and a life of captivity and servitude. Various Hong Kong movies such as *Ghost Nursing* (養鬼, 1982) and *Crazy Spirit* (養鬼仔, 1987) dramatize the costly consequences and horrors of this practice.

On a different note, Confucianism theorizes life and death differently. Confucian beliefs foreground the unknowability of death and emphasize social relations in the world of the living: civic responsibility requires one to behave oneself, guide the family, and, ideally, govern the nation and rule the world. To be ethical is to prioritize harmonious relationships between kings and officials, fathers and sons, spouses, brothers, and friends. The “harmony thesis” emphasizes that (political, social, and domestic) disorder is most unwelcome.

In contrast, Taoism emphasizes self-care as well as caring for the natural pathway or *dao* (道). Taoism is often valued as a purely Chinese religion, and Taoists worship Lao Tzu 老子 (571–470 BCE), venerating him as the Supreme Venerable Lord (太上老君). An important goal is to postpone death or to transform the self to become a fairy (or a god). Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* (《道德經》) affirms that adaptive quietism, or non-action (無爲), is the ideal bio- and eco-political principle for survival. Since mother nature is quiet and changeable, the natural way (*dao*) cannot be known by mortals, and human intervention can be counterproductive.

25 Kevin Lo, “Black Magic Baby,” *Atlas Obscura*, February 27, 2014, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/kuman-thong-roasted-fetuses-in-gold-leaf>.

26 Yin Lu, “Kuman Nature,” *Global Times*, February 17, 2013.

27 Elizabeth McAlister, “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 no. 2 (2012): 462.

The differences between the quiet way and the active way in Taoism led to the development of two main sects, with different priorities. The Quanzhen School (全真派) was founded by Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113–1170) in Shandong Province in 1167. Quanzhen priests prioritize a monastic, syncretic lifestyle infused with Confucian beliefs (such as filial piety), Buddhist disciplines (such as mindfulness and the rejection of marriage, egoism, and worldly ambition), and Taoist doctrines (such as letting go of human intervention, wisdom, and knowledge).

In contrast, the Zhengyi Sect (正一派) is a worldly, active order. Founded by the long-living Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (34–156) during the Han dynasty, it became powerful during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). In 1304, the court officially pronounced the 38th celestial master Zhang Yu-cai 張與材 (d. 1316) to be the “Master of Zhengyi” (正一教主). The Zhengyi sect values *dao*, or oneness with nature, and the philosopher Laozi. As Zhengyi priests do not emphasize discipline or meditation, they do not live a monastic life. They do not fast or abstain from sex. They sell charms and spells, offer prayers to those who request them, and perform paid services—Taoist funeral rites, exorcisms, temple opening ceremonies, ancestral temple ceremonies—at their clients’ request. Their mission is linked to universal salvation (普渡) and the elimination of demons.

The Zhengyi sect is popular in Hong Kong because members believe that good luck, sweet love, a happy marriage, and success can be obtained through human and priestly efforts, by doing good deeds, offering donations, invoking gods, chanting prayers, casting spells, and attaching yellow amulets or *fulu* (符籙) to the wall. The Zhengyi funeral rites are universally adopted in Taoist memorial services in Hong Kong. As promoters of a polytheistic religion, Taoist priests build shrines and pray to many gods and goddesses as well as dead kings and queens, generals, and ancestors, while lay faithful burn incense, offer food and flowers, and light candles before shrines. To honor the ancestors, the faithful burn joss papers and offer worldly objects such as model cars, clothes, or paper money in order to “feed” and enrich the dead. In exchange, the gods and the dead are expected to offer protection.

On a different note, Maoshan sorcerers (茅山術士) are famous esoteric Taoist priests, ghostbusters, and vampire hunters. Maoshan is a mountainous region of Jiangsu (江蘇) Province, and the sect began during the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE), when three brothers (or grand masters)—Mao Ying 茅盈, Mao Gu 茅固, and Mao Zhong 茅衷—devoted themselves to the study of medicine and alchemy. The founder, Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), credited the Mao brothers in his book *Chart of the Ranks of the Perfect Souls* (《靈寶真靈位業圖》), yet he honored a priestess, Wei Hua-cun 魏華存

(252–334), as the first Maoshan master.²⁸ Doctrinally, the sect followed the Taoist Shangqing School (上清派) in practicing discipline, meditation, and self-emptying in order to achieve oneness with the world. In terms of practices, Maoshan masters are famous as Wicca-like sorcerers in southern China. They require decades of face-to-face training in order to master the art of alchemy, mediumship, spells, divination, exorcism, and ghost hunting. Some are also skilled doctors, including Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), a brilliant herbal doctor of the fourth century. In northern China, sorcerers are followers of “horse fairies” (出馬仙). They are mediums who worship and also welcome the spirit possession of animals or reptiles such as foxes, weasels, hedgehogs, rats, and snakes in order to empower themselves.²⁹

Lam Ching-ying 林正英 (1952–1997), the leading actor in Hong Kong vampire movies in the 1980s and 1990s, greatly spread the fame of Maoshan sorcery. Maoshan priests value both natural magic (the use of astrological, alchemical, and natural elements), and ceremonial magic (mediumship, necromancy, witchcraft, magical rituals). Second, training involves many years of apprenticeship, and disciples are divided into different levels: high and low. High-level priests (上茅) vow to use magic for the benefit of humankind. They use oral formulas and “paper talismans to communicate with deities” and can “call upon soldiers from heaven, earth, and hell for assistance” with a view to curing “sickness [and] getting rid of evil spirits [and] demons.”³⁰ Those who are stuck at the low level (下茅) tend to be black magicians, and the worst are simply quacks. Black magicians know how to command spirits to advance their self-interest or to harm people. Similar to the way monks make *kuman thong*, magic folks can capture and bottle spirits, the condition being that the deceased must usually have died from an unnatural death such as suicide, murder, or accidents.

The darkest kind of Maoshan magic includes the creation of revenants. The 2013 movie *Rigor Mortis* dramatizes this procedure. A woman cannot bear to lose her husband, hence she asks a Taoist priest to turn her dead husband into a vampire. Zhao Gong-ming's *The Master of Maoshan III*, is another story that references the practice of resurrection.³¹ The ritual highlights a gruesome

28 “Taoist Sorcery: Understanding Chinese Magic,” Daoist Gate, June, 2012, <https://daoistgate.com/understanding-the-human-soul/>.

29 “Guanyu chu ma xian xiangjie, chu ma xian jieshao 關於出馬仙詳解，出馬仙介紹 [A Detailed Explanation of the Horse Fairies; An Introduction to the Horse Fairies],” 每日頭條 (Daily Headlines), September 8, 2016, <https://kknews.cc/zh-hk/culture/bkgv6n.html>

30 “Taoist Sorcery: Understanding Chinese Magic,” June, 2012.

31 See Zhao Gong Ming 趙公明, *Maoshan tianshi juan san: lian shi xie dao, di mu shi yao* 茅山天師 卷三: 煉屍邪道 · 地墓屍妖 [The Master of Maoshan III: The Occult Art of

process involving the careful selection of a corpse and the meticulous choice of a site where to cleanse and bury it. The next phase highlights the use of chicken blood, spells, the mixing of the priest's own blood with the amulet(s), and the vivification of the corpse. The magician often creates a wooden double of the revenant. The point is that the revenant can be so powerful or unruly that even the master may not control it, hence the destruction of the double can suppress the creature.

In *The Golden Bough* (1890), James Frazer (1854–1941) explains the principle of “sympathetic magic” and “contagious magic.” The law of sympathy is “imitative.” In short, the double can impact a person, for “things and people in the world [can] be physically influenced by means of other things that resemble ... them in particular ways,” so one can influence or control “distant objects” and “convey impression[s] from one to another.” Contagious magic refers to the idea that a part can affect the whole. “Magical sympathy” can exist “between a man and any severed portion of his person, [like] his hair or nails; so that whoever gets possession of human hair or nails may work his will, at any distance, upon the person from whom they were cut.”³² In the manual *Maoshan Sorcery* (《茅山法術：六甲天書》), Xie Ren-fang further notes that Maoshan masters can use revenants (陰人) as cheap labor to farm the land at night. However, Xie also points out that any violation of the natural order will be severely punished. He knew of a person who performed such magic and who later died a tragic death, with ants crawling all over his body and feeding on the corpse.³³

According to Taoist rites, there are many ways to fight vampires, but the job is best performed by a professional. Backed by many years of training, priests can build shrines or use consecrated black flags (黑令旗) to invite deities, command celestial soldiers for assistance, or control wandering ghosts. They can also use peachwood swords (桃木劍), coin swords (金錢劍), animal blood, incantations, yellow amulets (黃符), and spiritually activated fish nets to suppress, dominate, or catch evil entities. Vampires are particularly afraid when a priest continuously sounds the “bell of ghost” (帝鍾/鬼王鈴), a process mentioned by Yuan Mei's 袁枚 *What the Master Would Not Discuss* (《子不語》). One way to store a captured ghost is to put it in a vessel sealed with yellow talismans and cabalistic signs. The best method to kill a vampire is to burn it to ashes on a powerful pyre, thus dissipating the spirits (*hun* and

Refining Corpses; Devilish Corpses in Cemeteries] (Taiwan: Pu tian chuban jiazu youxiangongsi), 2016.

32 James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 43–44.

33 Xie Ren Fang 謝任芳, *Maoshan Fa Shu: Liu Jia Tian Shu* 茅山法術：六甲天書 [Maoshan Sorcery] (Taiwan: Mingguo Shuju, 2010), 21–2.

po) and leaving nothing behind. Many of these rites are faithfully portrayed in Lam's Mr Vampire Series.

4 *Mr Vampire I* (1985)³⁴: the Ancestor and the Confucian World Order

The hopping vampire movies of Lam Ching-ying are closely linked to Taoism because Lam studied Maoshan sorcery and wrote the yellow amulets used in the movies even though he never became a legitimate Maoshan priest. The uncle of Ricky Lau (Lau Kwun-wai 劉觀偉 b. 1949), the director of *Mr Vampire I-IV*, was a Maoshan priest, and Lau had a vivid memory of his uncle dying a painful death, claiming that all his enemies (exorcised ghosts) came back to torture him.

Lau is fond of Chinese history, so his films can be a gateway to understanding the complexity of Chinese culture and religion. The opening of *Mr Vampire I* (《殭屍先生》) references the custom in Xiang Xi Province. A Taoist priest known as Four Eyes 四目道長 is on his way to deliver corpses to an unspecified hometown. As the journey is long, Four Eyes places his “clients” in a mortuary, but the hopping vampires come back to life because the yellow amulets accidentally fall off their foreheads. The situation is brought under control when Master Kau 九叔 and his two disciples, Chau-sang 秋生 and Man-choi 文才, use Taoist magic, including eight-gram mirrors (八卦鏡), amulets, martial arts, and the dipping of blood on the forehead to immobilize the hopping vampires. Four Eyes decides to continue his journey with the vampires and rings the “bell of ghosts” to warn off humans and to command the dead.

The main plot of *Mr Vampire I* invites the audience to revisit Confucian ideology in old Hong Kong. The film is set in the early twentieth century, and the Yam family defends the notion of filial piety. Mr Yam Fat 任發 heeds the call of a *feng shui* master to dig up his father (Grandpa Yam) and seek a second burial twenty years later. Strictly speaking, *feng shui* (literally wind and water) is not related to religion but to geomancy, the concept being that people can change their fate by rearranging the five elements—metal, wood, water, fire, earth—and achieve a good flow of energy (*qi*) in the environment.³⁵ In the story, the *feng shui* master bears a grudge against the Yam family due to a land dispute.

34 *Mr Vampire*, directed by Ricky Lau (Golden Harvest Company, 1985), DVD.

35 Taoist priests and *feng shui* masters both study the eight trigrams mirror, so both are familiar with the principles of *feng shui*. However, Maoshan masters consider themselves superior because *feng shui* items have to be “spiritually activated” (開光) by Taoist masters before they can be used.

Grandpa Yam is deliberately improperly buried, thus disrupting the flow of natural elements and affecting the fortunes of his descendants. Grandpa Yam's discontent and grudges mean that he cannot let go and be reincarnated, and he is not pleased with his descendants. The powerful father—the symbol of governmental authority and protection in a culture that emphasizes ancestral worship—has become a hopping vampire.

The plot also problematizes the Confucian world order in the preindustrial Hong Kong society: the lawkeeper is not a lawful character, the ancestor is not a good father-figure, the lover is a ghost, and friends can be unkind to each other. When Grandpa Yam disturbs the peace, Captain Wai 阿威—a lawkeeper—is noted to be a corrupt character, and his chest is accidentally branded with the word “wickedness.” To punish the hubristic Captain Wai, Chau-sang extracts a hair from him and forces Man-Choi to swallow a yellow amulet along with the hair. Man-Choi thereby becomes the double of Wai and can control the latter due to contagious magic. As a result, Wai behaves oddly to the point of stripping before his relatives.

The film implies that blind faith in Confucian and cultural traditions can do more harm than good. The vampiric father kills his son and turns him into a vampire, and Mr Yam also wants to harm his fellow citizens. The vampire hunter—Master Kau—has a close relationship with his disciples Chau-sang and Man-Choi, but they become alienated from him, albeit for different reasons. Chau-sang falls in love with Jade 小玉 even though she is a ghost. Charmed by Jade, Chau-sang fights his master and is glad to see his love go free. Meanwhile, Man-Choi is bitten by a vampire. His behavior changes, and he increasingly wants to hurt those who are near and dear to him.

Master Kau is not a social reformer, but he will not put up with bad romance, bad father figures, bad disciples, or bad authorities. In Chinese literature, the undead females are often sexual predators, or what Anthony C. Yu calls “the amorous ghost” (*yan gui* 艷鬼).³⁶ Their presence denotes bad romance because ghostly female hypersexuality can suck out masculinity and even men's health or well-being. These bad romances are depicted in Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 1598 drama *The Peony Pavilion* 《牡丹亭》, Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 1624 story “Madame White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Tower” 〈白娘子永鎮雷峰塔〉, and Pu Songling's 1680 text “The Painted Skin” 〈畫皮〉. Master Kau is not fooled by Jade and uses the eight-trigrams mirror and a sword made of ancient coins to save his disciple from her grasp. According to Maoshan sorcery, this sword is good for resisting bad romance and killing

36 Anthony C. Yu, “‘Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!’ Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Fiction,” *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (1987): 429.

evil forces. To increase the sword's power, coins should come from the reign of the first five kings in the Qing dynasty.³⁷ The myth is that these coins have been through the hands of many, collecting many life forces (*qi*), and capable of canceling dark powers. Master Kau fights Jade, but she is allowed to live at the end. Chau-sang and Master Kau are reconciled, and the young man is not sorry for having loved Jade. However, the rich, vampiric father and son must die because they will not stop harming their own kind.

In the battle between men and vampires, the problem of class conflict is toned down, and the film emphasizes the vampire hunters' hegemonic masculinity and teamwork. Master Kau uses kung fu and Maoshan sorcery to fight the vampires, and his disciples provide useful assistance. True to the Chinese tradition of *deus ex machina*, Four Eyes suddenly appears near the end of the story and summons his ten hopping vampires to fight the vampiric grandfather. The elimination of all the bad hopping vampires denotes the downfall of feudalistic regime and conservative patriarchs.

The film ends with a slight hint of social change as power shifts to the hands of a middle-class woman. The young heroine Ting-ting 婷婷 is to become a career woman and the head of the family. Having received a good education, she switches freely between Chinese and westernized attire and is happy to engage with two kinds of traditions and cultures. She tells Captain Wai not to wrong any innocent man and is a caring nurse when Man-choi is ill. She is not powerful enough to be a vampire hunter, but in a modest way, she is a New Woman who can bridge cultural differences, and aspire to become a businesswoman.

5 *Mr Vampire II* (1986)³⁸: Abject Aliens and Capitalism

Mr Vampire I and *Mr Vampire II* (《殭屍家族》) were released after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. The colonial government wanted to speed up decolonization, but the Beijing government had other ideas. In those days, local citizens were reduced to choosing between staying or leaving Hong Kong. Both were tough choices: stayers feared missing out on something important, and emigrants faced acclimatization issues in foreign countries. In the meantime, plenty of Chinese immigrants aspired to settle—albeit illegally—in Hong Kong. The policy of repatriation seemed unkind, but the influx of illegal immigrants would greatly increase population pressure,

37 Xie, *Maoshan Fa Shu*, 74.

38 *Mr Vampire II*, directed by Ricky Lau (Bo Ho Films Company Limited, 1986), DVD.

the unemployment rate, and welfare problems in Hong Kong society. Stephanie Lam therefore argues that the central issue in Lam's vampire series "is not between humans and cadavers but between an abstracted Chineseness and a British colonial presence." The vampire "signifies an unstable middle ground in that its body, always in transit toward a final resting place, is neither here nor there, neither dead nor truly alive."³⁹

In *Mr Vampire II*, the setting is changed to the contemporary era. Unlike the powerful hopping vampires in old Hong Kong, these vampires mimic the second wave vampires in the West and are abject creatures. The film shows a family of three hopping vampires stuck in Hong Kong—a capitalistic society striving to find a balance between science and superstition, compassion and self-interest. In the end, the two adult hopping vampires are destroyed because they become antisocial aliens. They not only fail to acclimatize to Hong Kong society but also have a skewed ethics in that they prioritize their child but have no love for their neighbors or fellow citizens. The only exception is the young hopping vampire—a young boy who feels responsible for his human friends and opts for the greater good even at the cost of challenging his parents. Interestingly, the film does not reveal whether the vampiric boy will live or die at the end.

Mr Vampire II highlights how alien creatures suffer due to capitalistic greed as well as government bureaucracy. The opening references the ancient Chinese legend whereby three immobilized vampires are found in caves. Professor Kwok Tun-wong 郭敦煌, a selfish archaeologist, is a treasure hunter and eagerly asks his two students (Chicken 奕豬膽 and Sashimi 生番) to bring home the vampires. The name Tun-wong is a pun on Dun Huang (敦煌), a city in Gansu (甘肅) Province famous for its Mogao grottoes (莫高窟) and Buddhist art. While European interest in Chinese art and design could lead to new art movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an enduring fascination with the exotic can spearhead possessiveness as well as cultural depletion. Given that Chinoiserie is a profitable business, for many years, the finest Buddhist collectibles, statues, and frescoes were sold to Great Britain, France, Japan, and Russia. In the case of Professor Kwok, his goal is to sell vampires from the Qianlong era (1711–1799) to Mr Nelsson, a businessman. He believes that the vampire woman will surely appeal to the Western world because she has lotus feet (三寸金蓮)—a handicapping symbol of a wealthy woman since a woman with small feet cannot perform menial labor.

39 Stephanie Lam, "Hop on Pop: Jiangshi Films in a Transnational Context," *Cineaction* 78 (2009): 48.

The hopping vampires are victimized by modern Hongkongers. The professor is trained to worship commodity fetishism, and his two accomplices are immoral creatures: Sashimi is interested in necrophilia and wants to strip the vampire wife but is stopped by Chicken. Chicken is probably a pervert because his only love—other than his mother—is his “bird.” The team of three also endorses the idea of “finders keepers.” Professor Kwok makes a call to a potential buyer, but Nelsson is a shrewd businessman who demands to view a “sample” vampire before investing further. In the process, the vampire boy is lost and becomes separated from his parents. The film implies that if the sale goes smoothly, the three corpses may be sold to different buyers, leading to family breakdown.

The arrival of civil servants creates a turning point in the movie. The hopping vampires are compared to illegal immigrants from mainland China—a problem that had troubled colonial Hong Kong for decades. Once new arrivals crossed the border, they were either repatriated or granted a visa to stay. The analogy of the hopping vampires as illegal immigrants is strong because these Chinese newcomers are associated with the New Territories, and they create social problems. In the film, different governmental departments try to deal with these new arrivals but end up reaching no consensus and doing nothing. The police want to take ownership of the vampires, claiming that they found the bodies first. Medical doctors from the Department of Health want to examine the hopping vampires to ascertain their year of death. Museum curators argue that these national treasures are appropriate for exhibition and should belong to them. A captain from the Fire Department suddenly appears and announces that nothing should be done until the service's Director reaches a decision, adding that they may also need to consult the Immigration Department. These bureaucratic responses mean that no one knows what to do with the aliens except to place them in limbo. At some point, the hopping vampires are put in a morgue and their still supple flesh becomes frozen due to the low temperature.

Neighbor-love proves a controversial concept under the circumstances. Master Kau is a herbal doctor and vampire hunter, and his idea of neighbor love means that he wants to protect humans and exterminate vampiric threats. However, Yen 夏友仁, the journalist, is interested in the hopping vampires because he wants to be rich and famous. He eagerly takes photos of the vampires and ends up waking the living dead. Meanwhile, Chicken is bitten by a hopping vampire, so he bites Sashimi to make sure both are in the same boat. Professor Kwok suggests that hopping vampires' serum alone can restore their humanity, and the selfish duo become eager to save the vampires in order to save themselves.

The film implies that only children are capable of agapic love. Mr Hu is a widower and often spends time in his neighbors' house. Given that adults provide little companionship, children in the Hu family live in a world of their own. They keep secrets from their father and form a bond with the young hopping vampire, naming him "OK Boy." Due to the kindness of the children, the "illegal immigrant" has a chance to make friends with other children, tour Hong Kong, and enjoy his childhood. The fundamental problem is that the abject boy cannot speak any language, symbolizing the fact just like an illegal immigrant, he is doomed to be a misfit and an outcast in Hong Kong.

In the film, science and superstition, self-interest and compassion compete and complement each other in the battle against the aliens. To Fontaine Lien, the film singles out the power of Chinese heritage: society is "at stake when the police officer, bearing the authority of an institution imported from the West, cannot subdue the *geongsi* with guns and bravado." Meanwhile, the Taoist priest, "using traditional knowledge from China," can "vanquish the *geongsi* once and for all. The film is thus an affirmation of traditional Chinese heritage and its usefulness in an age of rationality."⁴⁰ My view is somewhat different. Taoists use magical tools such as the three-forked rake (三义戟), scripted amulets, and the peachwood sword to fight the vampiric couple. However, Master Kau, Gigi (Kau's daughter), and Yen fail to win the battle on their own. In turn, science comes to the rescue. Guns and bullets cannot kill the hopping vampires, but powerful lighting equipment, chemical weapons, and anesthesia can impact and paralyze these dangerous creatures. In the end, it is the combination of science and superstition that leads to victory. Master Kau and Yen drive the sword into the chest of the vampiric mother and kill her, and the vampiric husband is finished off by police rockets, anesthetic bullets, and strong chemicals.

The film's final message emphasizes agapic love and the doctrine of compassion—but the two may not go together. The vampire boy loves his young friends and saves the Hu family from his aggressive parents. The two children love OK Boy and do not want the police to arrest him, hence they let Master Kau inject anesthetics into the vampire boy and take him away. The young ones explicitly want to see their little friend in the future, but the father loves his family and refuses to let any vampire visit his house. As for Master Kau, given that the vampire boy is now an orphan, he sincerely believes that true compassion means spiritual repatriation. In this context, Master Kau wants to end the vampire child's suffering by giving him a second death and a chance of

40 Lien, "The Hong Kong Vampire Returns," 59.

reincarnation. However, the last scene highlights an open and truncated ending as the audience cannot tell whether Master Kau will kill the boy or let him live. His urgent task is to flee from Professor Kwok and his two accomplices now that they are both vampires. The film does not reveal how Hongkongers should treat local and non-local outcasts, but it clearly shows how self-interest and self-preservation can topple the order of things.

6 *Mr Vampire III* (1987)⁴¹: the Rivalry between Good and Evil Sorcerers

Mr Vampire III (《靈幻先生》) is unique in the series because it highlights the struggles between different types of ghosts and different schools of sorcery even though no vampires are involved. The story is set in a pre-modern period, and the opening lays bare the problems of the low order in Maoshan sorcery. Maoshan Ming 茅山明 is an incompetent priest, a quack who keeps two ghosts in order to advance his career and fool the world that he is a powerful exorcist. His ghosts—Big Pao 大寶 and Small Pao 小寶—are his willing slaves, but remarkably, they also have a will of their own. They enjoy hurting and torturing their fraudster master, yet they will also help him make money.

Maoshan Ming's service is needed by a family who built their house on a grave site where several generations rest. To exorcize the ghosts that haunt the family, Ming uses a shrine that comes with incense sticks, joss paper (冥鏹), wine, ancient coins, bagua (八卦 an energy map that divides space in eight areas around a center), fruits, the bell of ghosts, the seven-star sword (七星劍), and the bagua umbrella (八卦傘). According to Xie Ren-fang, spiritually activated bagua umbrellas are commonly used in temple or house opening ceremonies. The point is to cancel black magic and subdue evil spirits.⁴² When Maoshan Ming opens the umbrella, he can trap the two ghosts in it. However, Ming is an incompetent ghostbuster, and his exorcism has no impact at all. In the battle between ghosts, Big Pao and Small Pao also fail to conquer their ghostly counterparts. The female ghost declares that justice is on her side. Since it is wrong for humans to rob her family of their resting place, she demands to be left in peace. Maoshan Ming sees her point, and, humiliated by his failure, decides to leave town.

Maoshan Ming journeys on and meets Master Kau, and their conversation denotes the conflicts between the high and low orders in Maoshan sorcery.

⁴¹ *Mr Vampire III*, directed by Ricky Lau (Bo Ho Films Company Limited, 1987), DVD.

⁴² Xie, *Maoshan Fa Shu*, 14.

According to Kau, a priest's primary responsibility is to do good. The first commandment and primary priestly responsibility is to fight a lifelong battle against evil, not to violate the natural order and not to keep ghosts for selfish reasons. Ming eventually agrees that opposite elements such as men and ghosts should not keep company. The cost of keeping ghosts can mean social embarrassment: Ming eats alone in a restaurant, but he has to order food for three and serve his two invisible friends. Ming later decides to free his two ghosts. Yet he does this for selfish reasons, arguing that Big Pao and Small Pao only bring him bad luck.

Next, the film highlights the feud between two groups of sorcerers, namely the northern and southern orders of sorcery (南茅北馬). A group of autocratic "horse thieves" (馬賊) have no respect for others' property or territory and greatly alarm the villagers. The nocturnal horse-riders and bandits can be a nod to the worshippers of the horse fairies in northern regions. Since northerners idolize wild animals and fairies, the bandits look very different from the villagers: they have long hair, some wear animal furs and use moon axes (one of their magic tools) as weapons. Members of their bands also have names associated with animals or birds (e.g. Wild Boar, Eagle Head). The leader is Devil Lady 王婆, a black magician who can cast spells and command bats to attack her enemies. She drinks the blood of lizards in order to perform mind control over ghosts. Xie Ren-fang notes that magicians can have talismanic knowledge with which to control bats, house lizards, and spiders.⁴³ In the film, the Devil Lady fights Master Kau and flees at first but later reappears to capture Big Pao and possess his spirit for her own use.

Master Kau and Maoshan Ming use both natural and ceremonial magic to kill evil magicians. To fight the Devil Lady, Master Kau uses the sword of coins, spiritually activated fish nets, ancient coins, the blood curse, black dog's blood, and the formation of the "reversal of the five elements" (顛倒五行陣). Black dogs' blood is believed to be effective for breaking evil spells. The blood curse refers to the act of drawing blood from a finger and mixing it with incantations and smearing it on an object. In the film, Master Kau cuts his finger with his sword, smears his blood on the blade to increase the sword's power, and quickly kills one of his enemies. The reversal of the five elements is akin to a military concept and is normally used for the elevation of individuals to fairy or god status. In spiritual battlefields, if priests understand the secrets of the reversed five elements, this tactic can set a perimeter, master forces to be trapped, and attack enemies both within and without. At some point, the Devil

43 Xie, *Maoshan Fa Shu*, 19, 26, 29, 65.

Lady dies when she is staked by the sword of coins. Her body falls into a well, but her spirit (*hun*) lives on and bides its time to seek revenge.

Interestingly, several scenes provide a subtle reference to the fierce political battles raging between the Chinese and the British government at the time. When Maoshan Ming says that opposite elements such as man and ghost or North and South should not be joined, Big Pao argues that differences ought to be acceptable and says: "What about One Country Two Systems?" Small Pao is doubtful and asks innocently: "What is One Country Two Systems?" Once master and slaves go their separate ways, Big Pao is quickly possessed by new (northern) forces and is no longer his own self. He is brainwashed into seeing that Maoshan Ming is but an eagle—an enemy. Given that the Chinese pronunciation of "eagle" (鷹) is the same as "Britishness" (*ying* 英), Big Pao's traditionalism and sudden rejection of his master symbolize the contest between two ideologies and two groups of Hongkongers.

In the film, the eagle has not won, but neither has the creature from the North. Big Pao flees the scene when he sees that prolonged disputes bring only death. In his delusional state, he envisions a man wearing Chinese funeral attire. Near the end of the story, two northern magicians (Eagle Head and Wild Boar) are already dead, but their spirits can still possess the mind of two southerners—Fu 阿福 and Shou 阿壽. Southerners such as Chiang 阿強 and Te 阿德 urge people to stand together and seek unity, and they switch speech codes to sing in both Mandarin and Cantonese: "Unity is Strength (團結就是力量)." Ironically, all the Hongkongers with the means and the power choose to flee, while the stayers are left unprotected were it not for Maoshan Ming's sudden arrival and rescue of them.

The film emphasizes the death of evildoers but gives an ambiguous answer to the question of loyalty or whether one should trust these (northern or southern, good or bad) magicians. Maoshan Ming is a fraudster, and the practice of keeping ghosts is an ignoble one. However, were it not for the two ghosts Big Pao and Small Pao, the "good guys" would be dead. Master Kau borrows the horsetail whisk (馬尾拂) from the Supreme Venerable Lord (太上老君) to fight the ghost of the Devil Lady, but it is the self-sacrificing acts of Big Pao and Small Pao that save the day. The Devil Lady dies a second death. Her henchmen Wild Boar and Eagle Head are deep-fried in a cauldron of hot oil, presumably the worst penalty that can be administered to ghosts. Since the process leaves no spirits (*hun* and *po*) behind, there is no chance of the transmigration of souls or reincarnation. The ending of the film emphasizes that all the "bad guys" must go. However, the progressive message is that northerners and southerners, ghosts and humans are not always enemies. They can take responsibility to care for each other, and there is no essential conflict between humans, magic folks, and ghosts.

7 *Mr Vampire IV* (1988)⁴⁴: Local Religions and the Battle Against Vampires

Mr Vampire IV (《殭屍叔叔》) foregrounds the long-standing religious conflicts between Buddhism and Taoism. In spite of the syncretic nature of Chinese beliefs, Taoists and Buddhists do not always see eye to eye, and the earliest dispute can be traced to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE) in the first century. Regardless, both Buddhism and Taoism are major religions in Hong Kong, and the entertainment industry loves to present dumbed-down versions rather than official teachings in different schools of Buddhism or Taoism. In the film, the Buddhist monk Master Yat-yau 一休大師 upholds the Buddhist principles of life, mercy, and peace, but he uses a Buddhist symbol—the wheel of Dharma (法輪)—as a “weapon” to fight his enemy. Another unusual move is that he accepts a woman—Ching-ching 菁菁—as his disciple and lives with her in the same house. Master Yat-yau also befriends Kar-lok 家樂, his enemy’s disciple. Compassion prompts him to ask Kar-lok to release the two fish the latter just caught, and the monk is eager to be reconciled with his neighbor and “frenemy” Four Eyes.

Taoism is a complex religion, but the Taoist priest Four Eyes is all for the Maoshan practice of domination and control. There is a sense of déjà vu in this film because Four Eyes makes a living as a corpse bearer in *Vampire I*. This time, he is visibly more aggressive as he wants to dominate his ten hopping vampires’ every move. Empowered and protected by his bells and coins, he makes sure that the ten corpses will dance to his tune. The problem is that the Taoist priest’s behavior borders on sadism, and Four Eyes sometimes falls victim to his own methods. The moment he goes home and sees that his disciple is asleep, he casts a spell and commands the ten hopping vampires to beat anyone who screams “haiya” (meaning “ah”) and the vampires end up beating the wrong person—Four Eyes himself. In another instance, when Kar-lok prepares breakfast and invites Master Yat-yau and Ching-ching to share food with them, Four Eyes behaves rudely. No one can finish the meal, and the food is wasted.

In the movie, the director (mis)attributes the cause of religious conflicts to lifestyle differences: one is ascetic, the other materialistic. The monk sleeps on the floor and rises early. Morning prayers involve chanting scriptures, the beating of a fish-shaped wooden drum (木魚), and the occasional beating of a copper singing bowl (磬). According to Buddhist rituals, these three actions can amplify mindfulness. In fact, it is said that the “monotonous hypnotic

44 *Mr Vampire IV*, directed by Ricky Lau (Bo Ho Films Company Limited 1988), DVD.

sound of the drum actually seems to anchor the mind in the present moment faster, with more clarity and riveting forces, than simply watching breath.”⁴⁵

In contrast, Four Eyes is rich and lives a relatively easy life. His bed is protected by a large mosquito net. To create a soundproof environment, he covers his ears with coconut shells, cups, and cotton balls when he sleeps. Four Eyes cannot put up with the monk's rhythmic prayers in the early hours, so he asks Yat-yau to sell the house to him. As the monk refuses to move out, Four Eyes turns to black magic. He convinces the monk to give him a miniature doll, a double of Yat-yau, and asks the monk to leave a thumbprint on the doll. Once Four Priest returns to his home, he builds a shrine, burns some yellow amulets, and smears a human-shaped mini-straw man with his blood. This is a nod to the practice of Maoshan sorcery: to control the spirit of the enemy, one technique involves the use of 36 straws to make the shape of a human plus 19 coffin nails, an amulet, and a number of spells (茅山釘魂魄符 [Maoshan yellow talismans for nailing the spirits]).⁴⁶ Due to the ways of sympathetic magic (with like controlling like), Four Eyes owns Yat-yau, thus making the monk laugh uncontrollably and forcing him to hurt himself, pull out one of his teeth, and beat his head against a pillar. Ching-ching saves her master by making him swallow a head of garlic, and this breaks the curse.

The film offends no one because both Buddhism and Taoism are shown to possess great powers. By way of punishment, Yat-yau uses a Buddhist object that resembles a dharma-chakra to educate and intimidate Four Eyes. In its original form, the dharma-chakra is a wheel symbolizing Buddhist doctrine. The center of the wheel represents discipline—a way of life essential to practicing mindfulness. The wheel's spokes highlight the eightfold path (八正道). “Turning the wheel of Dharma” (轉法輪) means letting go of the self, getting rid of worldly disturbances from the senses, and transforming the self to become a saint. In the film, the center of the wheel is a mirror. The monk makes Four Eyes face the mirror then uses the reflected image of Four Eyes to create a double of the priest—a doll. At this point, Yat-yau wisely retreats and allows Ching-ching to control the doll and punish Four Eyes. As a man of non-violence, the Buddhist monk eventually accepts Four Eyes' plea for reconciliation. To undo the curse, Four Eyes' penalty is to drink a large bowl of oil.

The hopping vampire appears in the middle of the movie, but he is special due to his political status as royalty (the prince's uncle). Interestingly, even

45 Lee Kane, “Mokugyo: Drumming for a Wakeful Mind with the Wooden Fish Drum's Unique Sound,” *Buddha Weekly*, <https://buddhawebly.com/drumming-for-a-wakeful-mind>

46 Xie, *Maoshan Fa Shu*, 42.

though he wears an official surcoat bearing a mandarin's square (補服), he looks like a foreigner. In the 1980s, the situation in colonial Hong Kong was that Hongkongers were wary of both Beijing and British influences. The year 1988 saw electoral reform. The colonial government wanted to push for direct elections in the Legislative Council and published a Green Paper in 1987 and a White Paper in 1988 to this effect. However, the Beijing government deemed these moves too radical and objected to the idea of direct elections to the Legislative Council. The pro-Beijing business sector also turned conservative and argued that direct elections would harm the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. In the process, Hong Kong people became greatly divided, and direct elections did not occur until 1991.

Mr Vampire IV rejects vampiric intervention in daily affairs but urges audiences to accept ethnic, class, gender, and religious differences so that people can live in happy togetherness. In the film, the little Manchu prince is loved by his people. Instead of being a symbol of domination and exploitation, the prince is mild and requires local citizens' assistance. Gender is also not an issue. Attendant Wu 烏侍郎 is a gay man who loves Kar-lok even though the latter is reluctant to return Wu's love. Religious differences can also be canceled. Because of the hopping vampire, Yat-yau and Four Eyes soon join forces to fight the creature.

The arrival of a tyrannical hopping vampire marks the turning point in the film. It is said that only the Qing emperor can decide the fate of the royal hopping vampire, but the emperor in the North remains an absent character. At first, nobody knows what to do with an undead government official who dresses conservatively but looks like a foreigner. The uncle is eager to harm the prince, and cannot be contained by traditional tactics: he does not respond to the bell, the magical fish net, the seven-star sword, or the Buddhist prayer beads. At some point, Four Eyes keeps chanting and stamping his right foot, thereby becoming a powerful, inflated creature capable of fighting the vampire. In fact, this comic scene is linked to one combative practice in Maoshan sorcery (五門八卦壇式): to invoke all the gods for personal assistance, the priest must recite certain oral formulas, stamp the left foot a couple of times, and make angry noises. (In the film, the director deliberately changed the stamping to the right foot so as to avoid giving away too many magical secrets.)⁴⁷ However, the anti-establishment vampire can only be conquered by alchemical means. The creature is finally dead when vampire hunters feed it different types of poisons including cyanide and calculus bovis (牛黃) as well as a snake. What

47 Xie, *Maoshan Fa Shu*, 90.

is interesting is that in the end, the Manchurian hopping vampire looks more and more like an exotic creature, with long brown hair, deep-set eyes, and black complexion. The message is clear: the prince and his soft, localized administrative methods are accepted, but the uncle's violent, "foreign" way is deemed harmful by many.

8 *Vampire vs Vampire* (1989)⁴⁸: Multiculturalism or Xenophobia

Directed by Lam Ching-ying, *Vampire vs Vampire* (《一眉道人》) thematizes the importance of cultural diversity and religious pluralism. However, the film's emphasis on integrationism is mingled with xenophobia to highlight Hong Kong people's ambivalent outlook on this issue. The push-pull factors are many: people want to have an open mind; they defend religious and lifestyle differences, but they may also feel worried about exotic or strange elements. As a result, the film ends in a stalemate. Local ways are powerful, but they have limits. Though foreigners bring new problems, they can put an end to some of the existing troubles. Vampires can be good or bad, but all antisocial creatures must be removed.

This film pinpoints the arrival of third-wave vampirism because hopping vampires can now evolve and become helpful, vegetarian creatures. One Eyebrow 一眉道長—a Taoist Priest played by Lam—keeps an unnamed vampire boy to watch over his home. Keeping a ghost or vampire is deliberately portrayed as a harmless practice, especially when the master is a conscientious vampire hunter. The young hopping vampire is a happy, cooperative servant clad in a dignified black robe. He has free will and is naughty and friendly. As a vegetarian vampire, he has no interest in blood, and his diet consists mostly of tomatoes. However, his anonymous, aphasic state indicates an acute lack of social status, and he suffers from financial abuse. His wages are retained by the master, and his two friends force him to help them steal money.

This film also foregrounds the differences between the Chinese hopping vampire and the aristocratic European vampire. Western vampires are closely associated with colonialism and its legacy. Stoker's *Dracula* exemplifies "a 'transverse' colonialism, seizing territory from an oblique direction."⁴⁹ He moves from Transylvania to England, and with no need of force, he controls people's mind, achieves easy cultural assimilation, and gains "legitimate" control of British resources. In *Vampire vs Vampire*, the European vampire is a missionary from an unknown religious order. One theory is that the good

48 *Vampire vs Vampire*, directed by Lam ching-ying (Diagonal Pictures, 1989), DVD.

49 Groom, *The Vampire*, 54.

missionary, Father Kei 祈神父, fights a doomed battle against evil. The bad missionary is presumed to be a fallen priest and is interested in women. When he becomes regenerated, he is seen with a European woman, hence a hint that he may have problems with his vow of chastity. The religious mission is a failure, and the church is abandoned for more than a decade until a group of Catholic nuns decide to rebuild it.

The film emphasizes inclusivity and the complementary nature of different kinds of religions and religious power. Taoism emphasizes the natural way (*dao*). The opening of the film shows that the village is facing an ecological crisis because something has obstructed the natural way. The water is contaminated with many dead bats. Villagers jump to the conclusion that the cause must be linked to the Catholic nuns. One Eyebrow investigates the problem but stops people from demolishing the church. His efforts aim to help villagers locate a new source of water, and he practices Taoist magic to zoom in on a spot where people might dig a well. Ironically, the bats move the signpost so that villagers dig up the decomposed body of the bad priest instead. War between man and vampire quickly ensues, and One Eyebrow is an iconic vampire hunter who writes amulets, makes gesticulating signs, casts spells, recites formulaic prayers, uses martial arts in order to command the natural elements and fight off the vampire.

On the other hand, Catholicism dwells on God's miracles instead of human efforts. The nuns are led by a warm, loving, and humble Mother Superior, a part played by Maria Cordero, an actress with a Portuguese-Chinese heritage, to highlight the power of a non-local religion. Strong faith makes the Mother Superior a devoted servant of God, and she is much loved by her Chinese nuns. The film deliberately avoids pinpointing any religious order. The nuns wear a blue habit, but their headwear is inconsistent. Some nuns just bare their head, sometimes wearing a blue veil or a white veil that mimic those in *The Flying Nuns*, a 1967 TV show in which the nuns' veils parody the cornettes worn by the Daughters of Charity, an order founded by St Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) in the seventeenth century.

To obtain divine assistance, One Eyebrow builds a shrine to actively command deities and heavenly soldiers. On a different note, the nuns are humble and merely rely on prayers. The Mother Superior brings a Bible and preaches the Good News to One Eyebrow, who challenges her to make an egg hatch on the spot. The nuns pray, and a miracle happens as a chick emerges from the egg. In the film, no religious contest or conversion takes place: all the Taoists remain Taoists, and all the Catholic nuns remain as nuns.

Even though religious diversity is not deemed problematic, the film also highlights xenophobic sentiment. Hong Kong people often cite *feng shui* and have issues with the Cross. The arrival of the missionaries is also attributed to

be the source of problems: they bring new beliefs and creatures. Compared to the harmless Chinese hopping vampire boy, the European vampire demonstrates aggressive and antisocial behaviors. The first victim is the Captain's greedy girlfriend. For the sake of a ruby, she loses her soul and becomes a vampire herself. The European vampire also consumes a large quantity of blood in order to regain his looks and become powerful again.

The main problem is that even though Maoshan sorcery is powerful, it fails to dominate the European vampire. As such, the weapon to defeat the monster lies in interfaith collaboration. One Eyebrow and his team actively fight the vampire, but he has to work with the Mother Superior at some point so that the vampire is accidentally defeated. When the monster falls into a muddy puddle, it is the Mother Superior who has the faith and weight to suppress the vampire and make it sink. The last scene shows the logic of live and let live as the Mother Superior holds the Chinese vampire boy in her arms. Given that the vampire boy saves One Eyebrow several times, the film promotes a reconciliatory message. Xenophobia and the fear of foreign elements (e.g. vampires and nuns) are replaced by mutual respect, and the ending further hints that friendly creatures can live in some kind of negotiated co-existence.

9 Conclusion

Sammo Hung is a key figure in popularizing the hopping vampire genre, and the success of the Mr Vampire Series means that Lam is the iconic face of the Taoist priest/exorcist—a role that he reprises many times in films such as *Encounter of the Spooky Kind II* (1990), *The Ultimate Vampire* (1991), *The Musical Vampire* (1992), *Mr Vampire 1992* (1992), and *Exorcist Master* (1993)—before his early death at the age of 44 in November 1997.

On the whole, the theme of the Mr Vampire Series aligns well with the integrationist emphasis in the colonial Hong Kong film industry. In the exchange between locals and nonlocals, humans and vampires, all can be flawed characters. As such, these films invite audience to re-assess different practices and engage with various local and foreign, ancient and modern beliefs. The vampire hunter is trained to fight demons, but he has no intention to see that all vampires or ghosts are bad. What makes him stand out is his strived “apolitical correctness” and his sense of what Hans Jonas calls “substantive responsibility” in the civil society.

The vampire hunter is not an institutional man and thus avoids taking sides openly. His mission is to protect humans, even though he is under no formal responsibility (due to contracts or laws) to take on this challenging job. The

vampire hunter is not looking for gain or rewards, nor is he bound by political beliefs or religious duty to defend the social order. His training and civic spirit alone drive him to feel responsible for the protection of humanity, family, society, and good vampires. In the words of Hans Jonas, a person cares thanks to the “affirmative feeling of responsibility.”⁵⁰ The way of vampire hunters is doubly reassuring because contemporary society is increasingly polarizing and vampiric: the world “consumes itself,” vampires consume humans, and humans consume each other.⁵¹ In this regard, vampire hunters resist radical barbarism, whether local or foreign, traditional or erratic. Their cultural compass denotes a love of conservatism and open-mindedness: they welcome and befriend good hopping vampires and mostly aspire to put a stop to social chaos. The principle of inclusive difference is celebrated in a world of live and let live.

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁵¹ Simon Bacon, *Becoming Vampire* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 2.

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Contradictions of Visibilities in Oliver Chan's *Still Human*

Miguel Antonio N. Lizada

1 Introduction

On April 2022, the Hong Kong Television Broadcast Limited (TVB) found itself in a maelstrom of controversy. The source of the heated debates was the use of “brownface” in the series *Barrack O’Karma 1968* (《金宵大廈2》). In the series, Canadian-Hongkonger actress Franchesca Wong Yuen-wah 黃婉華 used makeup to darken her skin to play the role of a Filipina domestic helper who, disturbingly enough, was rumored to practice voodoo magic in the series’ storyline. Reactions to the brownfacing were polarized. On the one hand, Wong’s supporters, some of whom were ethnic minorities, praised the actress’s performance and saw nothing offensive in what she did. On the other hand, the incident triggered an outpouring of complaints from ethnic minority communities and social workers.¹

What made the incident even more controversial was the fact that it occurred at the end of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Hong Kong which, aside from being the worst wave to hit the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, saw the imposition of draconian policies that highlighted the ways in which foreign domestic helpers are repeatedly dehumanized and oppressed in the city. Chief Executive Carrie Lam 林鄭月娥 even went as far as to say that officials should “show no mercy” to domestic helpers who violated social distancing measures.² As a result, police and health officers paraded the Sunday day-off enclaves of domestic helpers and imposed fines of HK\$5,000/US\$640 (more than the minimum monthly salary of domestic helpers) to those who

1 “Polarized Reactions for TVB’s ‘brownface’ Controversy,” *The Standard*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/189164/Polarized-reactions-for-TVB’s-’brownface’-controversy>.

2 Corazon Amaya Canete, “CE Carrie Lam: No Mercy to FDW s Violating Social Distancing Regulations,” *Hong Kong News*, February 18, 2022, https://hongkongnews.com.hk/top_stories/ce-carrie-lam-no-mercy-to-fdws-violating-social-distancing-regulations.

allegedly violated the social distancing regulations.³ Efforts by NGOs and concerned residents to raise funds to help pay the fines were ultimately discontinued after Secretary for Labour and Welfare Law Chi-kwong 羅致光 announced that doing so could be construed as abetting a crime.⁴ Helpers who tested positive for COVID-19 were literally cast out into the streets by their employers and had to sleep in parks.⁵ They were also denied hospital care due to their expired work permits.⁶

While the film I analyze in this chapter was made around four years prior to the crisis, the aforementioned incidents suggest a sense of continuity in terms of the issues foregrounded in the film: at best, a sense of ambiguity in the treatment of ethnic minority workers and at its worst the overt inequality and discrimination both in the policies that govern marginalized groups—in this case, senior citizens and domestic helpers—in everyday life in Hong Kong and in the politics of representation that structure fictional depictions of life in the SAR.

Oliver Chan's 陳小娟 *Still Human* (《淪落人》, 2018), which explores the heart-warming relationship between Evelyn Santos (Crisel Consunji) and her paraplegic employer Leung Cheong-Wing 梁昌榮 (Anthony Wong 黃秋生), is considered a landmark film in Hong Kong cinema history in that it is the first film to feature a foreign domestic helper as a major character. To be sure, films that feature melodramatic and uplifting stories of domestic workers are hardly novel. For instance, the lives of migrant workers have been a prominent subject in the melodramatic tradition in Philippine cinema since the early 1980s.⁷ On

3 Sun Yazshou, Kristine Servando, and Rosalie E'Silva, "Hong Kong's Covid Crackdown Hits Domestic Helpers the Hardest," *Bloomberg*, February 26, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-26/hong-kong-s-covid-crackdown-hits-domestic-helpers-the-hardest>.

4 Tom Grundy, "HK\$107k Fundraiser for Domestic Workers Facing Covid Fines Axed after Official Says Campaign May Be Illegal," *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 19, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/02/19/hk107k-fundraiser-for-domestic-workers-facing-covid-fines-axed-after-official-says-campaign-may-be-illegal>.

5 Candice Chau, "Foreign Domestic Worker Spends 2 Nights in Hong Kong Park after Contracting Covid, as NGO Warns of 'Emerging Crisis,'" *Hong Kong Free Press*, February 17, 2022, <https://hongkongfp.com/2022/02/17/foreign-domestic-worker-spends-2-nights-in-hong-kong-park-after-contracting-covid-as-ngo-warns-of-emerging-crisis>.

6 Kathleen Magramo, "Domestic Helpers Denied Treatment, Forced to Sleep Rough after Testing Positive during Hong Kong's Fifth Coronavirus Wave," *South China Morning Post*, February 18, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3167607/domestic-helpers-denied-treatment-forced-sleep>.

7 Jose B Capino, "Filipinos at the Border: Migrant Workers in Transnational Philippine Cinema," in *Border Cinema: Reimagining Identity through Aesthetics*, eds. Monica Hanna and Rebecca Sheehan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 196.

the Hong Kong side, *A Simple Life* (《桃姐》, 2011) chronicles the moving relationship between Roger (Andy Lau 劉德華) and his elderly local helper Chung Chun-to 鍾春桃 (Deanie Ip 葉德嫻), who has worked for Roger's family for decades and who has become physically incapacitated after suffering a stroke. While *A Simple Life* in no way downplays Chung's life as a retired domestic helper, her position as a lower-class Hong Kong local in the employ of an affluent, transnational Hong Kong family means that the interaction between her and Roger in the film focused primarily on her status as an elderly woman. While *Still Human* does portray a relationship between a young and an elderly person, the roles this time are reversed, with the focus now on the foreignness of Evelyn and her liminal and contradictory identity as both a worker and to some degree a substitute daughter.

In centralizing a foreign domestic helper and making her the main character, *Still Human* marked the first attempt by Hong Kong cinema to creatively meditate on issues surrounding the boons and costs of domestic migrant labor at an individual level, one that was made possible under the patronage of the Hong Kong government. The film was lauded for casting the spotlight on two marginalized groups in Hong Kong: migrant workers and elderly citizens left to fend for themselves by their families. In this sense, visibility is at the center of the film's creative and critical politics. However, this visibility is more than just a state of visual presence and legibility. Here, I draw on Rey Chow's definition of visibility as that which "participates in a discursive politics of (re)configuring the relation between center and margins, a politics in which what is visible may be a key but not the exclusive determinant."⁸ Chow's useful reminder that what we are seeing on screen are not "real people" but "images" is an invitation to examine—among other things—"the specific materialities of image, affect, and fantasy, on the one hand, and the fraught complexities of globalized visibility, on the other."⁹

The chapter builds on existing conversations that interface affect theory with studies on representations of migrant labor by positioning the analysis within the politics of visibilities as defined by Chow. In recent years, affect theory, as mobilized and deployed by scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, has been used as a viable framework in accounting for the inherent contradictions that inform the politics and praxis of migrant labor from the Global South. Expanding Ahmed's characterization of "affective economies," where emotions "align individuals with communities—or bodily space with

8 Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Film: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 11.

9 Ibid., 12.

social space—through the very intensity of their attachments,” such scholarly works position the affective labor of care as a structure that produces—among other things—contradictory interpretations of home and homelessness as well as identity politics that challenge and uphold master narratives of the nation-state on both sides of the migrant labor exporting enterprise.¹⁰ Read in this manner, affective labor as a structuring paradigm neither wholly subsumes the migrant worker helplessly into the system of neoliberal capitalist transnational labor nor champions her as a triumphant heroine able to trump the system. Rather, the contradictions—indeed, the messiness of it all—reveal among other things the complex power relations generated by the ruptures, unintended as they are, from the transactional systems.

To this end, the ensuing discussion of *Still Human* examines how these tensions are colored and energized in an impactful way through the genre of the melodrama. Stereotypically regarded as “women’s films,” melodrama has been read time and time again as a means to examine societal issues through its use of sentimentality deployed within the domestic realm and extracted from the squabbles and griefs of personal (mostly familial) affairs. A prominent genre in the canons of both Philippines and Hong Kong cinema, the melodrama as a form produces a legible generic vocabulary generated through the tone of sentimentality, allowing for the effective meditation and transmission of discourses on migrant labor and its subsequent and contradictory impacts. Here, I turn once again to Chow’s work, this time to her definition of sentimentality as “an inclination or a disposition toward making a compromise and toward making do with even—and especially—that which is oppressive and unbearable” and as a “mood of endurance, a mode whose contours tend to remain fuzzy rather than sharply delineated and whose effects may more easily be apprehended as (a prevailing) tone.”¹¹

Drawing on Chow’s characterization, I read the sentimentality enacted in *Still Human* and deployed within the structure of the melodrama as a means by which the visual images (again, as characterized by Chow) that come to represent the domestic helper and the elderly citizen consolidate and meditate on the complex relations the film engages. Such complexities can be gleaned from the reconfiguration of social relations and the collapsing of

10 See Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117–79; Carlos Pioscos III, *Affect, Narratives and Politics of Southeast Asian Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Michelle Ho, “Desiring the Singapore Story: Affective Attachments and National Identities in Anthony Chen’s *Ilo Ilo*,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 9, no. 2 (2015): 173–186.

11 Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Film: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility*, 18.

defined boundaries that border ethnicity, class, and hierarchies. As Pei-chia Lan points out, “the placement of migrant workers at home strikes double anxieties among employers: home, socially perceived as a private haven sheltered from public chaos, now becomes a field of discipline and surveillance, while cultural barriers and social inequalities are so intimately present that they are impossible to ignore.”¹²

This chapter thus explores the inherent contradictions of this politics of visibilities enacted through the structure of melodrama and mobilized through the tenor of sentimentality. On the one hand, the relationship between Evelyn and Cheong-wing, which moves from a culturally-conflicting transactional relationship to an almost familial one, critiques the fracturing of both the Hong Kong and the Filipino family operating within the paradigms of neoliberalism and globalization. The alliance created by the domestic helper and the abandoned elderly father, figures that represent in varying degrees the fracturing and dissolution of the family, ultimately reproduces a structure of affective care beyond the typified structure of the nuclear family.

On the other hand, the film's conclusion, which promises a reunion between Cheong-wing and his son played by Himmy Wong 黃定謙 through the help of Evelyn and sees Evelyn landing a prestigious job as her protégé (likewise through the help of Cheong-Wing), reveals the limitation of this visibility. In participating in the partial restoration of the nuclear family and in being able to secure a promising future thanks to the patronage of her employer (and at the end of a contract at that), Evelyn can be seen as a figure operating within the fixed trajectory of a migrant worker. Ultimately, the kind of visibility presented in the film is one that truly acknowledges the humanity of both the domestic helper and the elderly man but does so within the permissible parameters of the status quo: granting legitimacy and dignity while simultaneously refusing to deprive the Hong Kong employer of power.

2 Screening the Filipina Migrant Worker

The exponential rise of labor migration (mostly of the blue-collar kind) from the Philippines was initiated through the endorsement and encouragement of the administration of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in the 1970s. Initially mobilized as a band-aid solution to the growing unemployment rate and fiscal crisis brought about by martial law and the excessive pillaging of national resources by the

12 Pei-chia Lan, *Global Cinderellas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 238.

Marcos administration, the labor export policies were eventually continued and updated by succeeding administrations. Such policies included the establishment of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) in 1972 and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) in 1982, the passage of The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, and in 2021 the creation of the Department of Migrant Workers, which integrates overseas work-related departments. Through policies enacted by these departments and offices, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are promised state protection and a range of privileges such as housing loans, express lanes in airports, exemption from travel tax levies, and free quarantine arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This sustained support can be attributed largely to the fact that aside from providing families of OFWs with better sources of income, remittances from migrant workers account for around 10% of the country's GDP.¹³ Marcos's immediate successor and widow of his slain chief rival, Corazon Aquino would later hail these migrant workers as "*bagong bayani*" (modern-day heroes). Then and now, oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia as well as Asian tiger economies such as Singapore and Hong Kong remain the destinations of choice for these migrant workers. In the case of Hong Kong and Singapore, an overwhelming majority are of the feminized kind, with most OFWs coming in as domestic helpers in their host cities. As of 2021, there were 339,451 domestic helpers in Hong Kong, of whom close to 192,000 were from the Philippines.¹⁴ Carlos Piocos III attributes this growing demand for domestic helpers to the neoliberal shifts that "resulted in these city-states' industries absorbing into the workforce their local women and middle-class mothers and wives, who were traditionally burdened with the unpaid labor of social reproduction."¹⁵

This continued and sustained influx of migrant workers led to a reconfiguration of physical and social landscapes. For instance, in her spatial analysis of "Little Manila" (referring to the Central district on Sundays), Daisy Tam notes that during this one day of the week when domestic helpers congregate in Hong Kong's central business district to enjoy their day off, Little Manila "represents a space of resistance, where these women reappropriate the space and architecture that symbolize the capitalist system within which they are

13 "SUMA: Summing-Up of the State Migrants under Aquino (2010–June 2012)," Migrante International, 2013, Scribd, accessed July 5, 2024, <https://www.scribd.com/document/96254642/SUMA-Summing-Up-of-the-State-of-Migrants-Under-Aquino-2010-June-2012>.

14 "Statistics on the Number of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong," Immigration Department, DATA.GOV.HK, 2021, <https://data.gov.hk/en-data/dataset/hk-immmd-set4-statistics-fdh>.

15 Piocos, *Affect, Narratives and Politics of Southeast Asian Migration*, 3.

oppressed.”¹⁶ Such modes of appropriations however are consistently met with resistance and hostility from certain groups within the local population which see such temporary presence as disturbances and eye sores that nevertheless “indicate an anxiety that stems from a wider interruption to the spatial, temporal, and socioeconomic order.”¹⁷ Such pushbacks from the local populace necessitated the installation of disciplinary mechanisms and other modes of control.

Indeed, in spite of their direct and indirect contributions to global Hong Kong's economy, domestic helpers have consistently been on the receiving end of unfair policies, discrimination, and even abuse that heighten their state of legal and personal vulnerability and precariousness. For example, the visa status of helpers disqualifies them from applying for the right of abode or permanent residency despite living in the city for years or even decades. The same post-termination two-week grace period to find a new employer, which supposedly prevents “job-hopping,” has also “inhibited migrant maids from leaving abusive employers and seeking legal redress in fear of losing their only source of livelihood, being repatriated with debts, and spending more for another cycle of deployment.”¹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic only made these workers' state of vulnerability worse. Prior to incidents of expulsion from the household and merciless imposition of fines, occasional lockdowns and home confinement led to a growing number of cases of physical and sexual violence. Unable to leave their employers' flats, some helpers suffered all kinds of physical abuse such as “beatings, groping, rape, long work hours and sleep deprivation.”¹⁹

Then and now, popular media such as film and television from both sides of the South China Sea function as critical material for meditating on the complex relationships generated by sustained transnational exchanges. As cultural products for mass consumption, these films should not just be read as neutral documentations of migrant labor, devoid of any kind of political commentary. Rather, they should be interpreted as active participants in both the reification and interrogation of such existing power relations. While the Hong Kong side's use of the film form emerged only recently (through the film *Still Human*), the

16 Daisy Tam, “Little Manila: The Other Central of Hong Kong,” in *Messy Urbanism: Understanding the “Other” Cities of Asia*, eds. Manish Chalana and Jeffrey Hou (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 123.

17 *Ibid.*, 122.

18 *Ibid.*, 23.

19 Selina Cheng, “Hong Kong Domestic Workers Faced Wave of Sex Attacks and Physical Abuse during Pandemic ‘Lockdown,’” *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 2, 2021, <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/06/29/hong-kong-domestic-workers-faced-wave-of-sex-attacks-and-physical-abuse-during-pandemic-lockdown>.

Philippines side had been producing films that meditate on such issues for decades. Most of these films could be interpreted as part of the cultural apparatus that sustains the valorization of OFWs and the deification of their sacrifice for family and nation. It is not surprising therefore that such OFW films often take melodramatic forms. As Pocos points out, such films “transmit and circulate particular ideas that reiterate the Philippine state’s rhetoric of migrant sacrifice for the good of the nation.”²⁰ More importantly, according to José Capino, such films also have a didactic function:

Often in these melodramas the ethical dilemmas arise out of the migrants’ responses to their exploitation, their wayward desires, and their divided loyalty to their homeland and their host nations. Because of melodrama’s penchant for rudimentary moral instruction, the resolution in these films is often heavy-handed.²¹

Taking Ahmed’s notion of affect into account, such OFW films provide an acceptable dosage of sentimentality to bind the OFWs, the family, and the complicit nation-state in upholding the existing system by way of sustained emotional investment.

While *Still Human* is a Hong Kong-made film, it is important to mention the generic features that define the OFW melodramatic film because it is helpful in contrasting the focus adopted by these films. As we will see in the next section, while the OFW films often use sentimentality and melodrama as a means of confirming the present state rhetoric through narratives of sacrifice and valorization, *Still Human* uses sentimentality as a means of negotiating the complexities brought about by the importation of migrant labor in a contradictory manner: highlighting the social benefits and attempting to restore the dignity of migrant labor while simultaneously upholding to some degree the status quo within the present system.

3 Products of Their Time: Two Marginalized Humans

At its core, *Still Human* is a story of two people belonging to marginalized and often dehumanized groups in Hong Kong—domestic helpers and the elderly abandoned or left to fend for themselves by their families—helping each other

20 Pocos, *Affect, Narratives and Politics of Southeast Asian Migration*, 160.

21 Capino, “Filipinos at the Border: Migrant Workers in Transnational Philippine Cinema,” 196.

to rise from their lot in life and recover their sense of dignity and humanity. The opening sequence of the film suggests this preliminary sense of bareness and absence. We first see Cheong-wing, alone in his small, cramped flat, asleep in his wheelchair and eventually woken up by the sound of construction work occurring somewhere in the building—a familiar scene for many Hongkongers living in public housing or private property. Wide shots of him wheeling down the quiet and almost empty corridors and the streets that amplify this sense of solitude follow. This building-up culminates in the first encounter between Evelyn and Cheong-wing at an empty bus stop.

The bareness in the bus stop scene not only emphasizes their respective position on the margins of Hong Kong society, but the emptiness also sets up the direction the film wishes to take in that it presents itself as kind of an empty canvas, a new beginning, and a way of starting over for two people who have been subjected to physical and emotional injury and experiences of abandonment. We learn later that Evelyn has left her low-paying job as a nurse in the Philippines to pay for her annulment fees and that Cheong-wing's wife and son have left him to start a new life in the United States. Complicating this further is the fact that Cheong-wing's only next-of-kin left in Hong Kong, his sister Jing-ying 晶瑩 (played by Cecilia Yip 葉童), has similarly left him after a falling out, visiting him only sporadically and only when necessary and thus leaving him to fend for himself.

In a sense, Evelyn and Cheong-wing are both products of their time and undeserved victims of their histories, of both the Philippines' and Hong Kong's experimentation with neoliberal paradigms of individuality and transnational economics that ultimately led to the fracturing of families. Evelyn for instance does not just represent any kind of domestic helper. As a trained and licensed nurse in the Philippines who can speak English with minimal difficulty and hesitation, she represents a particular subgroup of educated middle-class helpers who, given the economic conditions in the Philippines, would willingly submit themselves to being a caretaker to make ends meet. The elderly Cheong-wing's injury, which resulted from a freak accident that occurred on the construction site where he worked, is deemed a "useless" member of a neoliberal-oriented city, abandoned by his family, and denied care by the company that caused his lifelong disability. The difficulty Cheong-wing faces as an elderly paraplegic mirrors the reality faced by the aging demographic he is meant to represent. As Lih-Shing Chan and Kee-Lee Chou point out, "Although it is unlikely that the Hong Kong government would change its neo-liberal approach to welfare provisions, the high poverty rates among older adults and the increase in consumption poverty with age are alarming signs of the inadequacy of welfare

protection.”²² Indeed, if as David Harvey posits neoliberalism is “the financialization of everything,” then in the series of division of labor and capital, the elderly such as Cheong-wing function as remainders, who may not fall neatly into the neoliberal equation.²³

The evacuation of human presence, both in the film's opening scene and in other subsequent encounters, especially when paired with the soft, sentimental piano music that accompanies the burgeoning intimacy between the two, may also be seen as gesturing towards the construction of a kind of surreal or fantastic realm in which this reconciliatory narrative between employer and employee, brother and sister, father and son, and individuals and themselves could be enacted. This vision is not fantastic but instead grounded in reality. To turn once more to Rey Chow's politicized characterization of visibility as consistently negotiating the tension between the center and the margins and of the image as a visual permutation of materialities, affect, fantasy, and globalized discourses, we begin to see how *Still Human* functions not merely as a poignant and occasionally comedic take on an encounter between two unlikely individuals. Interpreted in another way, the film can also be read as Hong Kong society's attempt to meditate and interrogate the fabrication and reorganization of social dynamics brought about by the influx of migrant labor, with the resolution (that of Evelyn leaving for apprenticeship as a photographer and Cheong-wing rediscovering life) straddling tokenistic valorization and a sentimental apology. Oliver Chan, when asked about the genesis of her work, seems to confirm this:

It's an everyday thing, but I often thought, “Why are they sitting out here?” And until I started doing research I didn't really get it. It was a cumulative effect. Why are they coming here? What are the opportunities? And why is it always women? Though that's not really broached in the film. But the moment came from observing two people in my neighborhood that inspired these characters. Their interaction was genuinely sweet but I felt a bit uncomfortable. The employer and employee aren't supposed to mix. But then I reflected and wondered: why shouldn't they mix? Maybe she wasn't even a domestic worker. It really made me reflect on my own perceptions and behaviors.²⁴

22 Lih-Shing Chan and Kee-Lee Chou, “Poverty in Old Age: Evidence from Hong Kong,” *Ageing and Society* 38, no. 1 (2018): 53.

23 David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

24 Elizabeth Kerr, “Still Human: A Film About A Domestic Helper, A Paraplegic, and Human Dignity,” *Zolima City Mag*, January 9, 2020, <https://zolimacitymag.com/still-human-a-film-about-a-domestic-helper-a-paraplegic-and-human-dignity>.

In her own commentary on the film, Elizabeth Kerr confirms Chan's personal reflection when Kerr reminds her readers that *Still Human* "is first and foremost for Hongkongers."²⁵ Unlike Filipino-made films set in Hong Kong such as the critically-acclaimed romantic comedy *Hello, Love, Goodbye* (2019), which features touristy locations such as the Victoria Harbor and the Lion Rock hiking trail, *Still Human* sets its dramatic encounters in everyday places and practices familiar only to the local populace. These include setting Cheong-wing's residence in the Oi Man Estate 愛民邨, the use of the expression "Add oil 加油" and featuring Cheong-wing doing calligraphy during Chinese New Year without any explanation or commentary on the significance of the tradition.

The local orientation of the film is also evident in how the domestic helpers are featured. Evelyn's middle-class background, training as a nurse, and ability to speak English (even if it does not help her get along with Cheong-wing at first) fit the profile of an ideal domestic helper sought by most employers in Hong Kong. As Pei-Chia Lan points out, "Filipina women have dominated the global domestic labor market because of their English-language skills and relatively high levels of education."²⁶ Another important thing to note is that Evelyn's path to self-realization and freedom bears noticeable similarities to the success story of Xyza Cruz Bacani, a former Hong Kong domestic helper who became famous for her street photography and who bagged a scholarship from New York University—a point to which I shall return later.

Scenes that feature domestic helpers as a group can be seen as representations of conventional and stereotypical views of what Filipina domestic helpers do. This is especially highlighted in Evelyn's first conversation with her new group of experienced friends, who advise her to not become attached to her employer ("This is just a job"), look for a better employer if she has the chance (go job hopping), and act stupid and pretend not to know Cantonese in order to avoid doing additional chores. They also gossip about a former domestic helper named Carmen who managed to marry her wealthy employer. The scene, presented through a series of focused close-ups, mimics the "talking head" shots in interviews and similar formats. In adopting this seemingly documentary style of shooting the scene, the film presents these tips and tricks as truthful accounts of creative strategies used by domestic helpers to elude the system and get by. This emphasis on strategies and tactics is extended in a much later scene, albeit in a more comic manner, when the same group of friends purchase clothes from a mid-price retail store and then return them for a refund after a night of partying.

25 Ibid.

26 Pei-chia, *Global Cinderellas*, 10.

While there are also poignant moments, such as when the senior member of the group, Loma (Lucy Navarrete Valenzuela) grieves the passing of her long-time elderly employer, the focus of these scenes seems to highlight (to occasionally comedic effect) the creative tactics and strategies the domestic helpers use to trick their employers. In doing so, the film presents a sanitized version of how migrant workers are treated in Hong Kong. Not to be found anywhere are the cramped closets for bedrooms, the mattresses laid out in the kitchen for sleeping, and the “random” inspections by patrolling police officers. The worst Evelyn experiences is being sold vegetables in the marketplace for a much higher price and being reminded by Cheong-wing's sister that she is just a maid.

The emphasis on tactics and tricks does more than present a particularly local way of looking at how domestic helpers behave. These strategic tactics, which place a keen emphasis on how domestic helpers manage to survive as individuals in a foreign environment ultimately participate in the articulation of one of the film's theses: how this sense of reconciliation and restoration of humanity, which culminates in the affirmation of a Hongkonger's patronage, can lead to the creation and cultivation of a transnational neoliberal subject, of which Evelyn is a figurehead par excellence. To understand this, we now turn to one of the film's most apparent cinematic strategies: that of transforming Cheong-wing and Evelyn's employer-employee relationship into a “universal” experience of metaphysical transformation within the structure of melodrama while simultaneously confirming the status quo.

4 **Snow Falling on the Sun (Man House 新民樓): Visualizing Sentimental Inequality**

The film begins and ends with a rather picturesque scene of “snowflakes” falling from “cotton trees” and carpeting the sidewalks and roads. A soft piano instrumental accompanies the cascading, adding to the sentimental tone that structures the narrative and mobilizes the film's strategies. As foregrounded earlier, sentimentality goes beyond the mere solicitation of powerful emotions from the audience and functions instead as a strategic gesture of affect that attempts to consolidate the complexities and contradictions brought about by this transnational encounter. Throughout the film, heart-warming, humorous encounters between Evelyn and Cheong-wing develop this sentimental tone to great dramatic effect, the goal being to present a specific relationship that in many ways characterizes the unequal and transactional relationship between a local and his employee into a universal parable of humanity and the restoration of dignity.

The structuring of the film according to the cycle of the seasons (summer, autumn, winter, spring, and then concluding in summer again) can be read in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, it points to the film's attempt to erase the contractual and transactional relationship between Evelyn and Cheong-wing and transforms it into simply a human encounter as natural as the seasonal cycle itself; on the other hand, it may also refer to the cyclical nature of migrant labor itself. At some point, after Evelyn's departure abroad, the paraplegic Cheong-wing will still need the assistance of another caretaker, and the friends Evelyn leaves behind will either have to find new employers or return home once their contracts expire. Towards this, the sentimentality in the film may be interpreted as a means to obscure the tensions, stabilize the complexities, and maintain the status quo by transforming the encounter into a legible affective structure.

This strategy of using sentimentality to simultaneously universalize human experience and obscure but not neutralize existing structures of inequality is seen most powerfully and effectively through the film's deployment of the concept of "dreaming." The concept of "dreaming" (its genesis, its function as a source of hope, and its satisfying fulfillment) runs through the entire film. One of the pair's first emotional encounters has to do with Cheong-wing, still crestfallen at his lot in life and devastated that he cannot visit his son in the United States, chastising Evelyn for having dreams and aspirations: "Dream. What do you know about dreams? You're a maid, what's there to dream?" Such a remark obviously wounds Evelyn, who proceeds to run and cry in the bathroom. Later, Cheong-wing more than makes up for this hurtful remark by gifting Evelyn with a camera after learning about her love for photography and her aspiration to study photography abroad. He even goes on to encourage her to join a photography contest.

However, circumstances in the Philippines force Evelyn to secretly pawn the camera in exchange for money she immediately remits home. When asked about the whereabouts of the camera, she lies and tells Cheong-wing she misplaced it. Upon discovering that she pawned his gift, a disappointed and hurt Cheong-wing requests that Evelyn address him as "Sir" again. This short-lived tension is defused when he asks her why she has "bye-bye" her dream, to which Evelyn replies in a mix of English and Cantonese, "[English] Reality is harsh. Living cannot wait, but dreams can. I am a [Cantonese] maid [English] now. [Cantonese] I am okay like this. [English] I will add oil and be a good help. I make breakfast now sir." Evelyn's explanation of her choice to forego her aspirations, delivered not only in a mix of English and Cantonese but also with the use of a local expression of encouragement ("Add oil") speaks to her understanding and recognition of her reality and her total immersion into the world

in which she lives. This understanding is most especially pronounced through her refusal to use the English word for "maid" in order to linguistically demonstrate that she understands her place from the perspective of her employer. Her short reflection, which begins with a repudiation of her dream and ends with a statement of her daily duties ("I make breakfast now, sir"), mirrors the trajectory she has so far followed as a newly-hired OFW from the Philippines to a fully integrated worker in a Hong Kong enclave.

However, this is subsequently overturned in a melodramatic way when Cheong-wing decides to buy back the camera and sneaks it under the pile of laundry to go along with Evelyn's pretense that she simply misplaced the pawned camera. He also attempts to secretly resubmit her application to a Master's degree program in New York but, due to his limited understanding of the application process and requirements, he is unable to do so. Things eventually go well for the pair, with Evelyn winning a special award for her photos and getting the attention of a famous photographer, who becomes interested in taking her in as a protégé. Despite being elated at receiving such an invitation, Evelyn initially opts to stay and care for the aging Cheong-wing. In a dramatic and moving conclusion to the story, Cheong-wing deceptively instructs Evelyn to deliver important documents to someone in Harbour City. The package turns out to contain a portfolio of Evelyn's photographs put together by Cheong-wing by hand and, given his paralysis, with great difficulty. As the story reaches its dramatic crescendo, Evelyn turns to the last page to find Cheong-wing's calligraphy of the Chinese character for "Dreams."

Much like the sentimentality that colors the narrative and the use of the seasons as a gesture towards universalization, the notion of dreaming as the transformative life force that grants the characters agency and restores their dignity operates on two contradictory levels. On the one hand, it points to a simple, universal, and human desire to escape their lot in life, both physically and spiritually: Evelyn desires to be free from her unhappy marriage and to live her dream as a photographer, while Cheong-wing desires to see his son and to a greater extent find meaning once more in life. Yet the specificity of their characterization and lot in life are specific to the economic climate of the time in that what Evelyn and Cheong-wing ultimately desire is the ability to survive and find agency in a transnational, borderless world that has come to reject and oppress them.

The fulfillment of such a dream is best illustrated towards the end of the film, when, before they part at the bus stop, Cheong-wing refuses to take back the household keys relinquished by Evelyn. The gesture is not only a touching sign that the doors to his flat will always be open but also a reification of the film's thematic aspiration that points to how the imagined borders between

employer and employee, a citizen of a developing country and a resident of a tiger economy have now been diminished. More importantly, such a dream of escape can only truly be realized within the set structures of the status quo. For instance, Evelyn's aspirations are made possible not only through the emotional and financial support of her employer but also because her employer decides to return her passport and technically terminate her employment. Towards this, the Chinese calligraphy "Dreams" that appears at the end of the portfolio can be read as a stamp of approval of sorts granted by the employer as a mark of release and an insistence on how such dreams can be made possible under the care and compassion of transnational patronage. Equally important is the fact that the photography awards, which grant Evelyn the platform and the opportunity to "live her dream," are handed out in the Central/Western district of Hong Kong, illustrating how such dreams may only be realized upon the confirmation of the strata that make up the urban center.

In this regard, the film not only grants Evelyn some semblance of dignity and recognition but also elevates her as the ideal migrant worker: articulate, polite, and cooperative, whose ultimate goal is to restore the nuclear family (in this case, through the implied reunion between Cheong-wing and his son and the reconciliation between Cheong-wing and his sister) in a world fractured by the paradigm of neoliberalism. It is only when these reconciliations actualize that Evelyn is finally able to leave. In a film that uses mobility as a mode of figurative conceit, it is the able-bodied helper, not the paraplegic, who is rendered immobile relative to the capacity to move in a global, transnational space.

In the film's penultimate scene, a tracking shot follows a series of photos on the shelf featuring a renewed, reformed, and metaphysically resurrected Cheong-wing: first with his friend Fai 輝 (Sam Lee 李璨琛) at Evelyn's birthday celebration, a solo photo of his son on his graduation day, with his sister after an implied reconciliation, and finally with Evelyn during her awards ceremony. The tracking shot is then cut to show Evelyn beside the shelf, hanging Cheong-wing's clothes one last time before leaving to begin her apprenticeship. The juxtaposition of these images confirms Evelyn's position as the idealized migrant worker. Having performed her tasks as a caretaker of the household and as the figure who has restored the fractured family, she is now free to go, her contract terminated. As mentioned earlier, Evelyn's journey comes across as a fictional rendition of the celebrated story of Xyza Cruz Bacani. However, the parallelisms between Bacani's and Evelyn's stories do not simply function as easy and recognizable references. Rather, the ease of recognition becomes a limiting rubric that defines what a successful migrant worker can—or should—be. Such strategies appear similar to Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism," which she defines as a "condition of maintaining

an attachment to a significantly problematic object,” except that in this case, the textual strategies that articulate this sense of optimism are generated not from the marginalized figures but from the status quo itself.²⁷ In other words, Evelyn is an exception, a model of what is possible as she simply “adds oil” to the machinery that sustains the status quo.

5 Conclusion

Depicting social relationships in film in any form and in any circumstance is never easy. However noble and sincere the intention may be, the politics of representation will always be informed—consciously or otherwise—by the artists’ subject positions. Thus, the goal of my analysis in this chapter was not to imply that there was a malicious attempt in the crafting of a work that has no doubt sparked important conversations about the role and place of domestic helpers and migrant workers in the Hong Kong context. *Still Human* no doubt is a landmark film in many ways. However, as a film that inaugurates a much-needed conversation, it proceeds with such a discussion at arm’s length. It presents a safe, sanitized version of a prevalent issue that has had—and continues to have—a violent and unsettling history.

Where the film succeeds is in laying out a set of contradictions that interrogate the complexities embedded within the system of Hong Kong’s neoliberal governmentality. Drawing on Rey Chow’s characterization of images and sentimentality, I argue that such complexities in *Still Human* are seen in how the various representations are depicted and structured in a specific way through the melodramatic form. These representations feature inherent contradictions that simultaneously interrogate and confirm the systems of inequality within the paradigms of neoliberalism and transnationalism. In using the melodramatic form, the film is able to use sentimentality as a structuring principle in which an effective affective structure could be built.

Such contradictions do not necessarily make *Still Human* a bad film or a failed project. Rather, I argue that it is precisely these contradictions, more than the inaugural featuring of a domestic helper as a main character in Hong Kong cinema, that make the film a valuable addition to the canon of Hong Kong cinema. As cultural products, films are both sources of entertainment and resources for meaningful discussions. As in the photos that function as the

27 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 24.

film's titular and narrative metaphor, the film may just be a snapshot of a larger landscape and a beginning of a longer conversation.

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Institutional and Communal Creativity: Local Discourse and English-Language Creative Writing in Hong Kong

Antony Huen and Jason Eng Hun Lee

1 Introduction

As a world language, English occupies both a central and marginal position in Hong Kong, a city formerly under British colonial rule. We argue that this paradoxically core and peripheral dynamics is what opens up creative space and gives English as a language for creative writing a strategic advantage.

English-language creative writing in Hong Kong highlights an intersectionality that cuts across historical, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and commercial boundaries. Firmly wedged between competing traditions and sovereignties, the language introduced into a Chinese city against a colonial backdrop is on the margins of two (or more) language worlds and literary markets. For a long time, individual local talents have written bilingually. Eileen Chang 張愛玲 (1920–1995) is a well-known case in point, having published both Chinese- and English-language novels. Her 1955 novel *The Rice-Sprout Song*, for example, was originally published in English and later translated by Chang into Chinese as 《秧歌》 (lit. song of seedling). At the institutional level, English-language creative writing first gained a foothold in the early 1950s due to the effort of Edmund Blunden (1896–1974), then Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) from 1953 to 1964.¹ As the first participant with a Hong Kong connection in the University of Iowa's International Writing Program (IWP) in 1967–1968, Dai Tian 戴天 (1935–2021) later launched the first Chinese-language creative writing course at a short-lived non-government college, the Creative Experimental College (創建實驗學院), which he co-founded. Meanwhile, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Chinese-language creative writing courses only emerged much later in the 1980s.² In the twenty-first century,

1 Elaine Yee-Lin Ho, "Connecting Cultures: Hong Kong Literature in English, the 1950s," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (2003): 8.

2 James Shea, "Teaching Chinese-Language Creative Writing in Hong Kong: Three Case Studies," *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 21, no. 47 (2017): 2.

creative writing has become a well-established field with the rise of specialized departments and degrees, while the disciplinary framework is often linked to the creation, production, and promotion of local discourse for both global and local consumption.

This chapter aims to investigate the institutional and communal development of English-language creative writing in Hong Kong, focusing on its incorporation of a local discourse at two interrelated levels. In the first section, Antony Huen examines the pedagogy of English-language creative writing in the local tertiary sector. In the second section, Jason Eng Hun Lee traces the development of English creative writing and community engagement in Hong Kong.

The development of creative writing pedagogy in Hong Kong began in the colonial era. As argued by Eric Bennett in *Workshops of Empire*, literature was envisioned by writers at Iowa and Stanford in the 1950s as a post-war apparatus that would “save the world from totalitarianism or destruction”.³ This is reflected in the adoption (or adaptation) of the IWP model in Asia. Whereas IWP’s objectives were to “encourage fellowship among international writers and to promote a positive image of the United States,” in Hong Kong, the call for defending individualist values had a different meaning because it fed local writers’ desire to resist British imperialism and “to question Britain’s colonial position”.⁴ As Lui-Nam Ng puts it, Dai was famous because “before 1969, few poets touched on the theme of anti-colonialism.”⁵

Following the 1950s and 1960s, thanks to the efforts of Blunden and Dai Tian, the late 1990s saw the rise of personal, social, institutional, and organizational influences on promoting creative writing at different levels.⁶ Treading in Blunden’s footsteps, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim 林玉玲 (b.1944) contributed significantly to the promotion of creative writing in the School of English at HKU in the late 1990s to early 2000s. At a social level, the celebration of local poets and novelists, including Louise Ho, Leung Ping-Kwan 梁秉鈞/也斯 (1949–2013), Nury Vittachi (b.1958), and Xu Xi 許素細 (b.1954) helped to boost local creativity, with all of them emphasizing an inclusive, localist outlook in their writing, teaching, and community outreach campaigns. The medium of

3 Eric Bennett. *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 1.

4 James Shea, “From Iowa City to Kowloon Tong: On the Cold War Origins of Creative Writing Pedagogy in Hong Kong,” *Writing in Practice* 5 (2019): n.p.

5 Lui-Nam Ng, *The Life and Poetry of Dai Tian* (PhD diss., University of London, 1990), 160.

6 See, for instance, the following anthologies: *Hong Kong: Images on Shifting Waters*, eds. Joyce Hsia and T. C. Lai (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1977); *Hong Kong Poems*, Andrew Parkin and Laurence Wong (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1997).

expression could be English or Chinese, but the writers, many of whom were teachers themselves, similarly aimed not to abandon local literary characteristics, styles, or cultures. Having studied creative writing in Singapore and Hong Kong, respectively, Eddie Tay and Eva Leung reflected on their experiences, highlighting four key elements in producing and teaching creative writing: the need to “remove the mystique surrounding literary works,” “learn to regard English as a language of creative expression,” see creative writing as “an activity that is socially embedded,” and “consider the nature of the kind of sponsorship for creative writing.”⁷

Creative writing has become a formal discipline due to institutional support and programme accreditation. To appropriate Bennett’s words about post-war American creative writing in *Workshops of Empire*, there has been an “institutional flowering of creative writing” in today’s Hong Kong.⁸ Today, all eight public universities include creative writing in their course offerings at various levels.⁹ In addition, language centers such as the English Language Centre at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) use creative writing as a remedial tool for boosting students’ creativity. Outside the classroom, many universities promote creative writing through competitions, student-led journals, anthologies, and writers’ residencies. For example, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) launched the Chinese Creative Writing Program in 2013, which has featured internationally acclaimed writers such as Gao Xingjian 高行健, Yan Lianke 閻連科, and Yu Hua 余華. In the last fifteen years or so, new accredited creative writing programs have emerged, further empowering and legitimizing the discipline. These programmes include HKU’s Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Program in Creative Writing, which has been offered since 2009. Though City University of Hong Kong (CityU) followed suit in 2010, its MFA program only lasted until 2015.

The boom in institutional creativity has in turn reinforced and synergized community creativity. Mike Ingham hails the “strong connection between

7 Eddie Tay and Eva Leung, “On Learning, Teaching and the Pursuit of Creative Writing in Singapore and Hong Kong,” *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 8, no. 2 (2011): 110–111.

8 Bennett, *Workshops of Empire*, 5.

9 Apart from HKU’s School of English, the English departments of City University of Hong Kong (CityU), CUHK, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), and Lingnan University (LNU) offer creative writing course(s) to undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students. HKBU’s Department of Humanities and Creative Writing uniquely runs a bilingual UG-level creative and professional writing program, while the Department of Literature and Cultural Studies of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) offers courses on both Chinese-language and English-language creative writing.

university creative writing teachers and courses and the development of Hong Kong's English literary ethos," drawing attention to "the mutual support and synergy" between various "gregarious enterprises" that were founded as a result.¹⁰ Since the early 1990s, there have been more of these community writing groups, with which universities return to cooperating. They include the Hong Kong Writers Circle (1991), Hong Kong Women in Publishing Society (1992), OutLoud HK (隨言香港 1998), Peel Street Poetry (2005), the bilingual Kubrick Poetry Society (2006), Hong Kong Stories (香港故事 2012), and Kong-PoWriMo (香港詩歌創作月 2020). The exchanges are mutually beneficial as organizational leadership and activities often involve writers, academics, Native English Teachers (NETS), general educators, and local student volunteers. This institutional flowering of English-language creative writing in Hong Kong now cross-fertilizes its communal equivalent.

Furthermore, institutional creativity has spearheaded communal creativity among the general public, as in the case of the establishment of a number of literary festivals. The local government-funded bilingual Hong Kong Literature Festival was established in 1997. The Hong Kong International Literary Festival was founded in 2001. The Iowa-inspired International Writing Workshop (iww) was set up by Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) in 2004, and the International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong came into being in 2009. These events have been followed by local publications with a focus on Asian writing in English, such as *Dimsum* (1999–2005) (later relaunched as the *Asian Literary Review*) and, with the rise of digital and online journals, the webzine *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* and the bilingual *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine* (《聲韻詩刊》), launched in 2007 and 2011, respectively.

The rising popularity of English-language creative writing in Hong Kong can be attributed to efforts from both above (government-led educational initiatives and festivals), below (grassroots organizations and amateur reading clubs), and the sometimes fuzzy "middle" (academic and creative writing university instructors) eager to capture the mood for decolonization in the city as well as the emergence of a global literary marketplace that has given locations previously considered peripheries such as Hong Kong (and Asia in general) an opportunity to market themselves as "world literature" to the global centre using English as a *lingua franca*.

On the one hand, English-language creative writing has gained some degree of prominence; on the other hand, English-language pedagogical and literary

10 Mike Ingham, "Writing on the Margin: Hong Kong English Poetry, Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction," in *Hong Kong Writing in English: 1945 to the Present*, eds. Xu Xi and Mike Ingham (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 11–12, 7.

activities still occupy a doubly marginalized position in Hong Kong, trapped between local (predominantly Chinese-language) cultural norms and the global (predominantly Anglophone-dominated) literary market. Interestingly, this central yet marginalized status can provide some strategic advantage characterized by its focus on creativity and adaptation in classroom practice and local community engagement. Thus we draw on our common yet distinctive experience as university teachers, creative writers, and community stakeholders to reflect on the operation of English-language creative writing teaching and practices in Hong Kong. First, Antony Huen considers the pioneering work of Lim, Tay, and others in order to explore how institutional creative writing pedagogies are shaped by a love of local literary styles and cultures and are reflective of the adaptive and transformative nature of Hong Kong. Secondly, Jason Eng Hun Lee considers the extent to which ongoing community engagement and advocacy work by prominent poetry groups based in Hong Kong might enable new pathways to better engage young local writers as key stakeholders within the literary arts.

While highlighting the pivotal role universities play in the promotion of English-speaking creative writing in Hong Kong, this article aims to critically consider the extent to which institutional pedagogies have cultivated a truly inclusive, yet local ethos that accounts for the hybrid cultural, linguistic, and geographical make-up of Hong Kong. Writing shortly after the 1997 handover, the poet Louise Ho asked: "What are the features of the literary culture (if any) that are particular to Hong Kong?"¹¹ In the same article, Ho suggests that the territory still had to nurture "literary sensibilities" that could accurately and effectively represent the place and advocate the incorporation of English literary language in local writings.¹²

Nevertheless, what is the institutional pedagogical imperative when instructors curate course content and conceptualize what Hong Kong literature in English might constitute? One obvious learning outcome is to advance critical literacy so that student writers can learn from others' writings and handle local—if not international—curricula.¹³ Another explicit goal is to simultaneously train future writers to be innovative. As a result, major concerns are

11 Louise Ho, "Hong Kong Writing and Writing Hong Kong," *World Englishes* 19, no. 3 (2000): 381.

12 *Ibid.*, 381.

13 See Agnes Lam's "Defining Hong Kong Poetry in English: An Answer from Linguistics," *World Englishes* 19, no. 3 (2000): 387–397; Louise Ho, "Hong Kong Writing and Writing Hong Kong," *World Englishes* 19, no. 3 (2000): 381–386; Tammy Lai-Ming Ho, "Writing Hong Kong's Ethos," in *Cultural Conflict: Angles on a Coherent Imaginary*, eds. Jason S. Polley, Vinton Poon, and Lian-Hee Wee (Singapore: Palgrave, 2018), 179–207.

often centred on language usage. How creative grammatically and semantically can our students be? During his time in Hong Kong, Professor Blunden found humor in the linguistic mistakes made by locals: "In Hong Kong, there is a queer [rather than a *queue*] at every bus stop."¹⁴ In "Futures for Hong Kong English", Kingsley Bolton and Shirley Lim express a very different attitude to language use in the Blunden era of the 1950s and 1960s, considering it a "high watermark period for the "monoglossic" normativity of British English in Hong Kong" and an emerging tradition of "heteroglossic" or overtly vernacular writing that was just beginning to cast off colonial attitudes towards mongrelization and its pejorative association with inferior language use.¹⁵ While teaching a third-year double-semester creative writing course at HKU, Lim herself championed the adoption of localized English and multilingual creativity:

Lim has encouraged the emergence of an English contoured less on Standard British or American English and more on the usages featured in the English of the students' community. In this course, students are urged to observe their own surroundings, lives, and events, and to write with linguistic specificity, using names, lexical items, concrete references rather than generalities.¹⁶

In "Futures for Hong Kong English", Lim also cites Leung Ping-Kwan's poem "Leaf of Passage," written in Chinese as *Dou⁶ jip⁶* (「渡葉」) and translated into English by the poet himself as an example of "one kind of creative writing in English that is emerging in Hong Kong, when the writer draws upon the resources of both language worlds."¹⁷ Lim draws attention to the fact that Leung remarked how his earlier writings drew from the western stream of consciousness style, a technique he found more liberating than traditional Chinese techniques commonly taught in the classroom at that time. This shows that Chinese-language writers can benefit from Anglophone creative writing practices and produce localized creative works. Our goal in this article is to untangle the intricate links between an international language and a localized approach, noting the dynamics of sociocultural ideologies and the power of multilingualism, especially translanguaging.

14 Jason Wordie, "1950s Hong Kong Through the Eyes of a Nobel-Nominated British Poet," *South China Morning Post*, 29 June 2018.

15 Kingsley Bolton and Shirley Lim, "Futures for Hong Kong English," *World Englishes* 19, no. 3 (2000): 302.

16 *Ibid.*, 440.

17 *Ibid.*, 440.

In terms of methodology, we single out self-reflexivity. Our emphasis on personal experience is in line with the “reflective turn” in ethnographic studies, where researchers draw on “the use of the self to generate insights, establish patterns, and bring the voice of their research subjects to light.”¹⁸ This approach is also in line with the increasing use of autoethnography as a research method, which foregrounds “a systematic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation about self and social phenomena involving self.”¹⁹ Given our diverse backgrounds and careers, we are in a strong position to document and theorize the development of the creative writing industry and creative writing teaching in Hong Kong. Born in Hong Kong, Antony Huen received a local education before going to the UK for further studies. Jason Eng Hun Lee has British and Chinese-Malaysian heritage and was born and educated in the UK before moving to Hong Kong. Both of us received literary training in the UK and have many years of teaching experience in Hong Kong. We are two active members of a small, local, English-language creative writing community as well as a broader transnational network of poets with connections in Hong Kong, many of whom are creative writing teachers themselves.

2 Creative Writing Pedagogy: the Hong Kong Model—Antony Huen

In this section, I reflect on my experience as a locally and internationally trained poet and creative writing teacher, noting how my creative writing teaching and practice are increasingly marked by transformation and adaptation. My exposure to creative writing began at CUHK, where I completed my undergraduate studies in the Department of English. I took the course “Reading and Writing Short Stories” taught by David Parker (1943–2015), the Head of Department at that time. The required readings focused on canonical writers such as James Joyce and Raymond Carver and included two stories from *Hong Kong Stories: Old Themes New Voices*, an anthology published by CUHK’s Research Centre for Translation in 1999. Parker’s course as well as other courses, including “Reading Poetry” and “Hong Kong Literature in English,” made a strong impression on me because the syllabi foregrounded the writings of contemporary Hong Kong and Asian writers.

18 Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, “The Reflexive Turn: The Rise of First-Person Ethnography,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2013): 4.

19 Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C. Hernández, and Heewon Chang, “Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research,” *Journal of Research Practice* 6, no. 1 (2010): 2.

Mark McGurl's 2009 book *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* actively associated creative writing with Cold War politics. In "The Programmatic Era: Creative Writing as Cultural Imperialism," Harry Whitehead likewise argues that the history of creative writing education was linked to the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, an attempt to promote egalitarianism and individualism. Whitehead notes that creative writing "travels beyond the boundaries of its origins, bringing with it culturally particular literary forms, craft devices, and pedagogical models."²⁰ At the same time, there is a risk that creative writing can produce cultural imperialism.²¹ In hindsight, my initial training reinforced my belief in the value of teaching contemporary Hong Kong and Asian literature, noting the benefits of using local styles and cultures to transform what may otherwise be an Anglocentric or Eurocentric curriculum.

In Hong Kong, teachers promoted creative writing but deployed different tactics to question British imperialism. Dai Tian was famous for creating "an anti-colonial discourse" with his poetry. Upon his return to Hong Kong from Iowa, he "admonished Chinese writers who forgot their own literary traditions," urging them not to let their "mind" be "someone else's colony."²² When I was a student, I only had a vague sense of how my creative writing and literature teachers promoted a culturally diverse curriculum in a field dominated by an Anglophone tradition. I did not realize that their attempts were related to the decolonization of the curriculum. Eddie Tay, from whom I learnt the art of distancing and defamiliarization, once studied creative writing under the Singaporean poet Edwin Thumboo. Tay was surprised that "literary works were created in the same way as undergraduate essays" and came to recognize the "need to dissociate one's writing from the Anglo-American literary canons even as one writes in English."²³ As Tay's former student and now a creative writing teacher myself, I follow his localizing effort to include relevant Asian texts in the curriculum, acknowledging the "need" to decolonize creative writing. I also urge my students to be inventive when they distance themselves from the language of canonical writers. Enlightened by well-established creative writing teachers in Hong Kong, I was equipped with the global outlook and a local orientation early on in my career.

20 Harry Whitehead, "The Programmatic Era: Creative Writing as Cultural Imperialism," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 47, no. 1–2 (2016): 381–382.

21 *Ibid.*, 359.

22 Shea, "From Iowa City to Kowloon Tong," nap.

23 Tay and Leung, "On Learning, Teaching and the Pursuit of Creative Writing," 104.

Since the late 1990s, a group of creative writing teachers and former teachers have formed a community where members exchange pedagogical concerns and examine postcolonial politics, prioritizing cultural differences and diversity. In "Lore, Practice, and Social Identity in Creative Writing Pedagogy," Lim argues that creative writing teachers and researchers should engage in "theorizing and teaching out of rethinking on how diversity and difference, not merely gender and class but race and ethnicity, make visible distinctive elephants in the workshop."²⁴ My vision in teaching creative writing has been increasingly shaped by this shared vocation to adapt Western pedagogical models for local uses and teaching the writing of local stories.

I cut my teeth on creative writing in my undergraduate years at CUHK, but my creative writing journey largely began with my MA studies at the University of Birmingham, where I had the chance to participate in a highly interactive student-led creative writing environment. After returning to Hong Kong, I have taught at my alma mater and other universities. As a teacher, I always adhere to creative writing pedagogy, taking into account the two limits faced by most locally born and educated Hong Kong students: acquiring English as an additional language and having received limited literary training in primary and secondary schools.

Having documented my initial training in creative writing, I will now highlight the progress I have made as a creative writing teacher. First, I have followed my predecessors in adopting a workshop model, setting time for students' writing, peer feedback, and the instructor's response. Each lesson often begins with a brief explanation of a topic and my choice of set texts. Students then critique the texts in buzz groups, followed by their close reading of the texts and lengthy discussions in connection with the topic of the lesson. This is in line with what McGurl calls the "autopoietic process," emphasizing a dynamic network of relations between "experience," "creativity" and "craft."²⁵ In my workshops, I prioritize reader response and the learning of "craft" (or "technique") in class. Anglo-American literary techniques can be springboards for students to learn to hone their craft, and I use them to create a hybrid, adaptive pedagogical standard for my own use.

In the course of time, I have started to recognize the value of self-distancing from canonical works. In *The Program Era*, McGurl suggests that "craft"

24 Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, "Lore, Practice, and Social Identity in Creative Writing Pedagogy: Speaking with a Yellow Voice," *Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2010): 90–91.

25 Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 23.

can be taught in terms of the literary “lore.”²⁶ When I taught in CUHK’s English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU), I focused on canonical works, making limited attempts to help students to dissociate their creative writing from canonical styles. ELTU offers academic English courses to all CUHK students, and I co-designed a course titled “English through Creative Writing” to encourage students to write in a non-academic context. The reading list was short, but it included a number of works that exhibit West-East connectivity. These include Ezra Pound’s 1917 poem “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter,” a loose translation of Li Bai’s 8th century poem “Changgan Xing 長干行 [Ballad of Changgan],” and Haruki Murakami’s 2023 translated story “The Birthday Girl.” In the list of supplementary readings, I included *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* and *cu Writing in English*, a student-led journal published annually by the English department since 2001.

My next breakthrough was my emphasis on localization. Having taught the course a few times, I came to realize the potential for Hong Kong writers to consider “an Asian background an advantage rather than a burden.”²⁷ However, due to my limited teaching repertoire, I did not actively fill the curriculum with the works of Asian writers. A turning point came when I taught a postgraduate creative writing course in the English department at CUHK. This course was a milestone in my “constant transformation as a literary researcher, teacher and poet in Hong Kong, my home city.”²⁸ I drew on my training at Birmingham and experience of attending a wide range of creative writing workshops during my doctoral studies at the University of York. I dedicated two weeks to broadly defined Hong Kong poetry, teaching the works of poets based in Hong Kong, such as Eddie Tay and Nicholas Wong 黃裕邦, and diasporic writers who were born in Hong Kong but live elsewhere, such as Kit Fan 范進傑 and Jennifer Wong 王詠思. I wanted to challenge students’ understanding of the term “Hong Kong literature (香港文學),” which “always implies a certain Han-centrism or even Sino-centrism” and “usually means Hong Kong literature written in the Chinese language only.”²⁹ In the curriculum, I also struck a balance between the time spent on canonical giants and lesser-known Asian

26 Ibid., 23.

27 Antony Huen, “Texts for Teaching Poetry Writing for Language Learning,” in *Exploring Creative Writing*, ed. Graeme Harper (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016), 138.

28 Antony Huen, “Questions of the PhD,” *Hong Kong Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 183.

29 Lo Kwai-cheung 羅貴祥, “Hong Kong Literature and its City (香港文學與城市),” in *Hong Kong Urban Culture and Urban Literature (香港都市文化與都市文學)*, eds. Leung Ping Kwan 梁秉鈞, Amanda Hsu 許旭筠, and Lee Hoi Lam 李凱琳 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Story Association [香港故事協會], 2009), 140.

writers. For instance, the module on “national and cultural identity” included W. B. Yeats’ “The Municipal Gallery Revisited,” Moniza Alvi’s “Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan,” and Jee Leong Koh’s “Kinder Feelings.” This culturally diverse and Hong Kong-oriented syllabus represented my hope to open up new conversations in class as I wanted the syllabus to feature local, regional, and global poetry, giving students a sense of the centrifugal development in the world of contemporary poetry and poetics. In other words, canonical and Anglophone works were juxtaposed with culturally diverse writings in English.

Local stories were singled out to emphasize relational intimacy and alienation effects. These stories were chosen for their “scenes, characters, social fragments, political themes,” with elements “that are recognisably local yet not bounded to place.”³⁰ For example, Wong’s poem “Diocesan Girls School, 1990–1997” portrays the experience of students who attended the girls’ school (also Wong’s alma mater). The opening lays bare students’ ambivalence about English hymns: “We sing English hymns from the blue book,/as if those songs were our own.”³¹ Similar to other Hong Kong poems included in my course, Wong offers a slice of life, noting the “socio-political and cultural dimensions of literary production and consumption.”³² In the poem, Wong questions the “socio-political” implications of singing “English hymns,” but she also alludes to the fact that she wrote an English poem (a kind of “song”). Her writing becomes a self-reflexive critique of her postcolonial mentality, while the poem serves as a meta-critique of Anglocentrism in Hong Kong education. In response, I reminded my students that the purpose of the course was to engage with and reverse the cultural hierarchy in the Anglophone literary tradition. The project of decolonization is not to cancel the past but to create a counter-discourse to subvert white domination and highlight hybrid, alternative voices.

In turn, the Hong Kong model of creative writing pedagogy strings together western craft, local heritage, and current socio-political development for the empowerment of alternative discourses. In “Retooling Workshops of Empire,” Khem Aryal discusses “the Australian model” of creative writing pedagogy, valuing the “socio-political and cultural dimensions of literary production and consumption.”³³ According to Aryal, universities in non-Anglophone countries are “in an advantaged position” as they can reference not only the US,

30 Bolton and Lim, “Futures for Hong Kong English,” 440.

31 Jennifer Wong, *Letters Home* (Rugby: Nine Arches Press, 2020), 13.

32 Khem Aryal, “Retooling Workshops of Empire: Globalising Creative Writing with an Edge,” *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 19 no. 2 (2022): 245.

33 *Ibid.*, 245.

UK, and Australian pathways and existing theories about creative writing but also utilize “local literary traditions and heritage.”³⁴ Given the boom in creative writing programs in Hong Kong, the city is in a strong position to link up “a new generation of Hong Kong-connected poets.”³⁵ University teachers in Hong Kong are eager to revisit the Anglophone elements in textbooks in light of their local and Asian traditions. They can also draw on the works of fellow poets based in Hong Kong or in the wider Anglosphere to make comparisons between canonical and contemporary works and between local and diasporic writing. The socio-political movements of 2014 and 2019–2020 and their legacies can provoke discussions, facilitating the use of poetry to provide socio-political and cultural commentaries. As Lo puts it, “[l]iterary writing in Hong Kong is always determined by its socio-political circumstances.”³⁶ The Hong Kong model is about Hong Kong literature as well as world literature.

The Hong Kong model is a starting place for creative writers to explore Hong Kong identity. In hindsight, I could have paired Nicholas Wong’s “Teaching English Poetry in Hong Kong” with Jennifer Wong’s “Diocesan Girls School, 1990–1997.” The former was locally produced and written from a teacher’s ironic point of view: “Now, embrace the colonial language,/words that you claimed to know.”³⁷ When I taught at CUHK, I used Eddie Tay’s “How Hong Kong Works” from *Dreaming Cities* (a 2016 collection of Tay’s poems and street photographs) to show how creative writing encompasses intentionality and ambiguity. The refrain of Tay’s poem is this: “how hong kong works, no one knows,/though everyone says *mm goi, mm goi* [the Cantonese transliteration of 唔該, meaning *thank you*].”³⁸ There is in the poem eagerness to know “how Hong Kong works,” but any inquiry is limited to knowing how local people repeat Cantonese phrases. While Jennifer Wong’s poetry is typical of her “commingling of memory and political commentary,”³⁹ Tay characteristically uses his art to navigate between his diasporic and bicultural background as a Singaporean poet and Hong Kong citizen since the early 2000s. The poet reminds students to do more than “embracing the colonial language.” Instead, we should experiment with code-switching and code-mixing, taking note that translingualism is a form of alternative postcolonial discourse.

34 Ibid., 248.

35 Antony Huen, “The ‘old Hong Kong’ and ‘a gold-sifting bird.’ Hong Kong and Chinese Ekphrasis in Contemporary British Poetry,” *Wasafiri* 37, no. 1 (2022): 20.

36 Lo, “Hong Kong Literature and its City,” 145.

37 Nicholas Y. B. Wong, *Cities of Sameness* (New York: Desperanto, 2012), 81.

38 Eddie Tay, *Dreaming Cities* (Singapore: Math Paper Press, 2016), 3.

39 Huen, “Hong Kong and Chinese Ekphrasis in Contemporary British Poetry,” 16.

In addition, ekphrasis is key to the Hong Kong model of creative writing pedagogy. In writing, ekphrasis highlights an individual's engagement with an object or a work of art. In *Dreaming Cities*, the poem "How Hong Kong Works" is juxtaposed with Tay's photograph of a bespectacled man on a double-decker bus in Hong Kong looking out at some bilingual neon signs. On his online blog *Hong Kong Lucida*, Tay reported that "the grungy hairstyle coupled with the meditative pose inspired the poem."⁴⁰ Although the poem does not reflect the common understanding of *ekphrasis* by addressing any specific details of the image or even the human subject, it shows the poet's deep engagement with the image by embodying an extended "meditation" on "how Hong Kong works." For instance, the poem, which includes quoted expressions in both Chinese transliteration and English, could be "inspired" by the bilingual neon signs in the photograph. Ekphrasis in the broadest sense is almost always emphasized in my creative writing teaching because I want my students to recognize the parallel developments of different art forms in Hong Kong and beyond.

Reflecting on her teaching of ekphrasis at a university in Pakistan, Asma Mansoor notes that "English was nativized" in her students' ekphrastic writing, attaining "a novelty" when students reappropriated English words and discourses.⁴¹ This idea is similar to my co-author Lee's recognition that local poetry can be useful for young learners acquiring English as a foreign language. These learners can use poems to connect "different language scripts" and facilitate their recreation of various aspects of everyday life in Hong Kong.⁴² As I teach ekphrastic writing, I use Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" to help students examine an object in multiple ways. I also have students study photographs of their friends or family in relation to theories of Roland Barthes and John Berger. While the western method provides a scaffold, students are encouraged to reappropriate the existing method to re-visit local objects, persons, and places, thus evoking new and old memories and imagination as "suitable" subjects for creative writing.

Finally, the Hong Kong model spotlights multilingualism and multimodality. Tay's "How Hong Kong Works" uses transliteration (e.g., "*mm goi*" [lit. "Thank you" in Cantonese] and "*ni hao*" [lit. "How are you" in Mandarin]) to collapse the boundary between three languages and speak of a complex linguistic identity.

40 Eddie Tay, "Portfolio: Dreaming Cities," *Hong Kong Lucida*, n.d.

41 Asma Mansoor, "Ekphrastic Practices in Catalysing Creative Writing in Undergraduate ESL Classroom," *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 11, no. 2 (2014): 225.

42 Jason E. H. Lee, "Found Poetry and Communal Memory-making in the L2 Classroom," in *Poetry in Pedagogy: Intersections Across and Between the Disciplines*, eds. Dean F. Gui and Jason S. Polley (Oxford: Routledge, 2021), 155, 158.

As a native Hong Kong poet, I have also experimented with visual images and multilingualism to my advantage. My poem “Cantonese Proverbs,” published in the webzine *amberflora* (January 2021), drew its inspiration mainly from Pieter de Brueghel’s painting *Netherlandish Proverbs*.⁴³ This poem is based on my translation of various Cantonese proverbs. I believe that cross-fertilization between local and global languages as well as print and multimodal cultures can inspire my pedagogical and creative writing practices. I also work to popularize this kind of creative writing among teachers, practitioners, and students.

In sum, the proposed Hong Kong model highlights western craft as well as local traditions, socio-political events, ekphrasis, multilingualism, and multimodal techniques to facilitate defamiliarization and reconstruction of post-colonial and post-1997 identities and cultures. Though this model is based on my own pedagogical practices, the list could be expanded. A core objective is to situate Hong Kong writers among Asian writers, contrasting different types of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic writings in English. Students are taught to be sensitive to and critical of cultural pluralism. When they are tasked with writing a “Hong Kong poem,” they can mix different languages and media to discuss Hong Kong politics, Chinese art, the changing cityscape, cultural traditions, or the oriental perspective on Hong Kong. In the essay “Hong Kong Viscera,” published a decade after Hong Kong’s handover to the PRC in 1997, Chan Koon-Chung argued that the city’s “postcolonial conundrum” includes “deconstructing or critically canvassing all pre-packaged discourses that have been mobilized to describe Hong Kong from the outside.”⁴⁴ Chan’s vision of the city “from the inside” informed his idea of “Hong Kong as method.”⁴⁵ Here I echo Chan’s postcolonial vision. The Hong Kong model enables us to mingle insider and outsider perspectives and to critically engage with the legacies of British colonial rule and the complex geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century.

3 Local Community Engagement: the Case of OutLoud HK (隨言香港)—Jason E. H. Lee

Building on Huen’s discovery and implementation of a localizing creative writing pedagogy, I now look at how recent developments in the wider community

43 Antony Huen, “Cantonese Proverbs,” *amberflora*, no. 10 (2021).

44 Koon-Chung Chan, “Hong Kong Viscera,” *Postcolonial Studies* 10 no. 4 (2007): 389.

45 See *Heunggong yingau jokwai fong faat* 香港研究作為方法 [Hong Kong Studies as Method], ed. Chu Yiu-Wai 朱耀偉 (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book, 2016).

might complement existing creative writing programmes currently offered in classrooms. Whereas Huen draws from a largely pedagogical frame for his concept of “a local discourse,” I consider more holistically some of the literary, linguistic, economic, and cultural dimensions that may be bound up within such a concept before looking at how community groups may also meaningfully contribute to the goal of developing a locally inflected literary practice and tradition. In particular, I document the historical journeys of the various poetry and spoken word collectives over the past two decades, tracking their respective evolutions and exploring the role these groups play in helping students in university classrooms better connect with the city’s own amateur and professional outlets and organizations. While supporting Jeri Kroll’s idea that creative writing itself “has multiple identities in the community rather than one restricted to formal educational structures,”⁴⁶ I consider what synergistic possibilities these two groupings might offer one another. Insofar as writing courses and programs help to populate these community groups, conversely, these groups help graduates position themselves through their writings on and about the city, network with their peers, retain and replenish a key stakeholder-ship in creative writing venues, and fast-track their own career development through local and international publications.

Before I offer my own perspective as a hybrid scholar and creative writer working from within the community space, I must come back to a number of mitigating factors that have impeded these various groups’ past outreach endeavors. One of the most frequent challenges confronted by scholars advocating for a local turn in Hong Kong Anglophone literature is the lack of a critical mass that would allow an identifiable Hong Kong literary community to emerge, especially one that could “claim nomenclature and locality.”⁴⁷ Certainly, the recent successes of Hong Kong poets published in the UK have raised the profile of Hong Kong Anglophone poetry internationally, while the recent 2021 National Poetry Prize (UK) winner Eric Yip 葉晉瑋, a hitherto unknown and unpublished student poet from Hong Kong, has sparked interest in the nascent development of writing from within the territory. However, these have also brought into being a tension regarding what counts as local Hong Kong in the international arena, what constitutes a marker of success, and how and to what extent such successes are imbricated within issues of citizenship, class, and mobility. Such tensions are not particularly new, and

46 Jeri Kroll, “Creative Writing and Education,” in *A Companion to Creative Writing*, edited by Graeme Harper (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 247.

47 Louise Ho, “Hong Kong Writing and Writing Hong Kong,” *World Englishes* 19, no. 3 (2000): 176.

the local versus cosmopolitan perspectival divide that has helped to crystalize Hong Kong's marginal status in world literature remains as true today as it was at the beginning of the millennium.⁴⁸

While grand pronouncements that Hong Kong literary writing in English has finally achieved critical mass have been issued on many occasions before, these assertions must be taken with a healthy dose of scepticism.⁴⁹ Though I or my fellow writers might make such a claim today, in light of another new generation emerging, along with the graduating classes of the last two decades, we remain as marginal to a majority-speaking Chinese environment as before. There remains a stubborn disconnect between how English is perceived as a tool for creative expression versus how it is primarily used to secure a well-paid job and career in the city or overseas. As Michael Tsang has stated, it is hard to escape the functionalism of English in Hong Kong society at large as it is not always seen as a language that offers "sensitivity, aesthetics, emotional reward and academic escape."⁵⁰ Indeed, the constant need to factor in students' desire for "socio-economic advancement and upward social mobility" carries through even into the profession, where some of the territory's best and most promising writers ultimately settle into a life of office cubicles, numbers, and financial charts.⁵¹

Many graduate participants have received creative writing instruction lasting several semesters in their four-year undergraduate programs. Yet their knowledge of how to carry their poetry into the professional field by way of public readings, networking, and taking those first tentative steps towards publication remains underdeveloped. While student-led creative journals provide some initial source of validation and encouragement, it is by and large the graduate MFA program that has sought to fill this gap thanks to its billing as a terminal degree, which allows its graduates to produce extended creative portfolios for later publication and secure jobs at the tertiary level (though not, under current University Grants Committee [UGC] rules, tenure-track positions in Hong Kong's public universities). However, such self-funded programs carry prohibitive costs and can deter many promising underprivileged writers from ever establishing themselves.

48 See Jason E. H. Lee's "Glocalizing Hong Kong Anglophone Literature," in *Cultural Conflict*, 307–324.

49 See, for instance, Mike Ingham's "Writing on the Margin," 15.

50 Michael Yat Him Tsang, "In Dialogue: Contesting the Politics of Globalization in Hong Kong Literature in English," in *The Future of English in Asia*, eds. Michael O'Sullivan, David Huddart, and Carmen Lee (London: Routledge, 2015), 179.

51 Tay and Leung, "On Learning, Teaching and the Pursuit of Creative Writing," 108.

While there can be complaints that these writing programs pander to the ethos of the market more than they nurture conditions for a more socially embedded community collective, a similar charge can be made against the make-up and constituency of these various communities themselves, which can often appear to first-time visitors as too “international”, too “expat”, too “male”, or sometimes even, too “white.” While these sentiments quickly fade in light of continued exposure to these groups, and accounting for the fact that these communities have historically always been open and inclusive venues that proactively engage in local community-building activities, the perception, however false, that these groups serve a narrow constituency merits serious consideration, as such surface impressions show that representation *does* matter, even in its sometimes banal visibility and reduction of participants according to ethnicity, class, gender, or language proficiency.

In the past, Anglophone literary writing groups and societies were the exclusive domain of educated, well-to-do people supported by a few generous benefactors.⁵² Today, in lieu of de facto patronage, such community groups are expressly run by volunteers and do not benefit from the largesse of a university-affiliated grant or a grant from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC). The three co-founders of OutLoud, Mani Rao, Alan Jefferies, and Christopher (Kit) Kelen, who have all since moved on from these shores, and the Hong Kong-born Sri-Lankan co-founder of Peel Street Poetry Nashua Gallagher, who espoused a “build it and they will come” mentality, worked largely outside the market-driven creative industry in their attempts to fill a broad church by operating on the basis of “freedom *from* professionalism.”⁵³

These founders, along with later organizers of these groups such as David McKirdy, Madeleine Slavick, Victoria Radford, Martin Alexander, Kate Rogers, Henrik Hoeg, and Akin Jeje (to name but a few), worked on an ad-hoc basis with other festival or university-led initiatives, drawing on the latter’s relatively larger economic and organizational resources and in return, often helping to fill up their venues with their own supporting members. There have also been attempts by local writers, with occasional funding from academic institutions, to support local schools and the wider community through workshops, competitions, public readings, and educational resources. These activities relate to a broader tradition going all the way back to Lim’s Moving Poetry Scheme piloted at HKU in 2000, through activities conducted under the aegis of the government-sponsored Budding Poets Scheme, to the *Cha* Writing Workshop

52 Kroll, “Creative Writing and Education,” 245.

53 David Myers, *The Elephant Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996), 77. Emphasis added.

Series, which sought to include less privileged schools and refugee centers, and finally, to the *Writing-Plus* online literary platform set up by Nicholas Wong in association with EdUHK. Naturally, these all have impact-led community engagement built into them, and their ability to feed into university-imposed requirements such as extra-curricular, experiential, or service-learning components makes them ideal partners for the academy to work with.

It may be useful to think of the co-evolving relationship between the university creative writing program and the community group in the way we think of the through-train system or a vocational school, with the latter substituting for the mentoring or apprenticeship Iowa model inherited by many MFA-trained instructors and consolidating the community group as a “valuable seed-bed for new talent as well as an opportunity to hear more established poets.”⁵⁴ As these community members themselves report, these spaces allow them to participate in a group environment on an ongoing weekly basis, to trial or workshop a poem in front of an audience and seek feedback, to revel in and experiment with audio-visual delivery during a live performance, and to participate in a forum of poetic exchange.⁵⁵ All of these expand on the creative writing ethos tertiary programs have developed while adding the professional activity of collaborating with established and prominent Hong Kong-affiliated members, launching and selling books, and, for good measure, engaging in their own wider community outreach projects.

Though all these interrelated activities help to sustain a virtuous circle within the literary ecosystem, they also signal tremendous though long dormant possibilities to activate at community level the localizing impulses and pedagogical shifts Huen advocates in his section above. It is with this sense of untapped potential that I turn towards recent changes made to the organization and branding of OutLoud, Hong Kong’s longest continually-writing English-language collective. In the following paragraphs, I suggest how Hong Kong-born and -educated members of a new post-millennial generation such as Felix Chow, Louise Leung, Tom Chan, and Elizabeth Chung are—by accident, design, or friendly coercion—actively integrating into the organization and succession planning of the group, which is now known bilingually as OutLoud HK (隨言香港). As creativity and influence do not operate in a vacuum, I consider the spillover effects such a change might have on the wider community and whether this coming to visibility of a new group, with its own distinctly

54 Ingham, “Writing on the Margin,” 7.

55 See Agnes Lam’s “The Hong Kong Poetic Community: Ten Poets’ Experiences,” in *Asiaticum Journal of English Language and Literature* 8, no. 2 (2014): 17–35.

local aesthetic, might help to bring into wider circulation some of the earlier pedagogical imperatives currently taught within the university classroom.

One appealing facet of these new generation poets' writing is that it draws more from the local influences of their immediate forebears (and instructors), including Nicholas Wong, Eddie Tay, James Shea and Tammy Lai-Ming Ho than from any directly imported Anglo-American writing tradition. In addition, many of their poems contain bilingual content that serves both as markers of authenticity regarding the local experience and as potential scaffolding or models for future work. For example, Tim Tim Cheng, a local Hong Kong graduate based overseas with a MSc in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh, has remarked that despite coming through a full five-year UG double degree in English and Education at HKBU, it was not until she heard a poem performed by Felix Chow at the online Poetics of Home literary festival reading in 2021 that she found herself longing for the local cultural references of her childhood. Chow's poem, titled "So 𠵼𠵼,"⁵⁶ follows none of the rhythms and intricacies of standard English metrical form and instead drops into verse examples of translated Canto-slang, "Laugh at street-gang videos/ where a beefball beats up a teen," untranslated characters, "吹雞疊馬撩交𢭛𢭛" (meaning "Blowing whistles Gathering pals Picking fights") and even the Cantonese romanization system known as *jyutping*, as in "sik6 waan4 bark at siuz faan3/to get out of the way," (meaning "Hawker Control Officers [from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department] bark at unlicensed street vendors to get out of the way") to further alienate monolingual and non-local Chinese readers.⁵⁷ The poem's embrace of unintelligibility singles out its status as an anti-language poem.⁵⁸ Cheng notes that "[t]here was also a sense of secrecy, if not revenge: it is not often we hear an English poem that is more intelligible to a bilingual audience (who use English as a second language) than a monolingual Anglophone one."⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Cheng is also aware of the pull to "compromise [her] voice to achieve a more universal intelligibility."⁶⁰ While her writing does not overtly use linguistic code-switching, or Konglish elements as Chow's does, she

56 Quoted in Tim Cheng, "Poetry Speaks: Cheng Tim Tim's Selections – Reading Felix Chow, Reading Hong Kong," *Agora*, March 2, 2022, <https://buhk.me/2022/03/02/poetry-tim-tim>

57 Local bilingual readers may also tangentially connect these hawker and street-gang references in Chow's "So 𠵼𠵼" to the so-called "Fishball Revolution" in 2016, in which a dispute between government officers and hawkers quickly escalated into a violent confrontation between police and hawker-supporting protesters.

58 See M. A. K. Halliday, "Anti-languages," *American Anthropologist* 78, no. 3 (1976): 570–584.

59 Cheng, "Poetry Speaks."

60 Tim Cheng, "Lantau (Rotten Head)," *The Tiger Moth Review*, no. 7 (2022).

achieves the effect of a local habitation. For example, Cheng's recent poem "Lantau (Rotten Head)" focuses on the representation and occasional transliteration of Cantonese terms via her own poetic voice: "There's a reason why, in Cantonese, */sheung ong*, getting to the shore, /could mean getting an apartment, /which is to say, you were settled."⁶¹ The poem ends by drawing attention to both her own and her persona's marginalized status with the realization that "our new skyline /might look the same, if not more insane, /but we would not be in the picture /the way we never were."⁶² Her poem demonstrates a fidelity to both the local neighborhood and fishing community of Lantau Island and her own place-bound aesthetic principles.

We can now revisit Tsang's call to interrogate what is "lost or made invisible when we seek the international spotlight and hail global exchange as an achievement of Hong Kong English writing."⁶³ In this vein, these recent poets appear to be working from a counter-intuitive logic; rather than working to amplify their voices globally, they embrace their own marginality within the global literary field. One reason could be that after the recent political turmoil in Hong Kong, the world is interested in the city in a way that it was not before, and these younger writers are encompassing a marginality that is now strategically viable, indeed, desirable, in the face of the more "global success" of their overseas peers. It is via this strategic marginality that I want to make the case for a viable turn towards the locally bound tradition that might energize the community.

As revealed in this section, the wider Hong Kong creative writing community is fostered not only by universities' classroom teaching and their other initiatives but by the regular meetings and varied community-wide events organized by local creative writing groups. These mostly voluntary organizations were founded by established writers and are increasingly stimulated by a postmillennial generation of poets, who are locally educated and seize opportunities to further their education abroad and publish their works in international venues. Their contributions to a local literary ethos are marked by turning the doubled marginalization of Hong Kong literature (i.e., in local society and within literatures in English) to their advantage through self-consciously establishing themselves as multilingual speakers writing in the English language.

61 Ibid. In Cantonese, "*sheung ong*" (上岸) literally means "arriving on shore," indicating that a person has "landed" and gained financial security.

62 Ibid.

63 Tsang, "In Dialogue," 181.

4 Conclusion

The growing success of an expanding group of young writers who are locally trained but with an international outlook, which owes itself to both formal and community-based training in Hong Kong, reveals the many symbiotic relationships in the local creative writing industry: between the universities and community groups and between different demographics. A dynamic Hong Kong literary tradition is institutionalized by a broad and intricate network of writers, academics, literary reading and writing groups, and students through their insistence on localization in teaching and community engagements.

There is ground for being optimistic about the future prospects of the creative writing scene in Hong Kong, with growing local and international recognition of writers with a local background, the widened variety and exposure of community-based efforts to nurture creative writing talents, and ongoing university-led pedagogical and publishing endeavours such as those led by Eddie Tay and Nicolette Wong in CUHK's Department of English and the world's first bilingual English and Chinese Master of Arts (MA) in Creative Writing for Cultural Professionals offered by HKBU's Department of Humanities and Creative Writing. Much as creative writing may remain a marginal pursuit in the predominantly capitalistic city of Hong Kong, creative works from and about Hong Kong are expected to continue thriving on the margins. It is the liminal space between local and global that marks the poetics of these works and the writers themselves, which, in turn, constitutes a local but globally conscious creative writing ethos that drives the development and recognition of a truly Hong Kong literary tradition.

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This interdisciplinary volume provides a multifaceted exploration of the kaleidoscopic transformation of Hong Kong. It examines the region's diverse historical developments, the challenges of digital surveillance, the impact of Orientalism, the power of individual agency, minor literature, films, popular culture, and the trajectories of creative writing programs.

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